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ENGLISH DRAMA



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ENGLISH DRAMA

THE LAST GREAT PHASE

(IL TEATRO INGLESE)

by

CAMILLO PELLIZZI

translated by

ROWAN WILLIAMS

with a foreword by

ORLO WILLIAMS

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FOREWORD

My friend Dr. Pellizzi, who occupies the chair of Italian at London University, has asked me to write a foreword to the English translation of this work, by way of pleading with English readers for indulgence towards a book addressed to an Italian public far less well informed than they about the subject-matter. This plea I make simply as a formality; for, although Dr. Pellizzi aimed at making his work a compendious handbook as well as a serious study, it is mainly on the latter and more important side that, for us, it is so well worth reading. On the purely informative side the author freely acknowledged his use of all available English books in his bibliographical note to the Italian edition. In this respect he does not claim to be original, and I may note here that, while references have been checked, there has been no attempt to bring the work, which was finished in 1932, up to date. But the original and interesting thing which Dr. Pellizzi gives us is a comprehensive and outside point of view. It is the point of view of a cultivated Italian, brought up, naturally, in the Latin and Catholic traditions, who has lived many years in England in close association with English life and institutions: and from it the English character and typical approach to life, though familiar and in many respects admired, appear far more curious and sharply featured than they appear to ourselves, who are part of them. In studying modern English drama, Dr. Pellizzi shows us

what we look like from the outside. This is, therefore, not simply a piece of dramatic or literary criticism, nor simply a chapter in the history of our drama: it is, rather, a study of modern English drama as illustrating both a chapter in the social history of England and the unchanging character of the English mind.

The author refers to his book, in the concluding pages, as a novel of which the chief character is "l'anima inglese", and to some extent his description is true; for what he presents to the reader is a cycle of dramatic history in which, under the stimulus of a recurrent process in the English soul, a stagnant drama budded again, reached florescence and died away, the whole cycle corresponding to a culminating phase and crisis of the English middle class. His own, Latin and Catholic, view of history and drama enables him to see all the more clearly the outlines and dynamics of the opposite—the Protestant or Romantic —point of view: and the great value of this book is that it is based throughout on profound, human conceptions, unlike too many modern essays in sterile technology. From the very outset, in a short and lively historical sketch, he focusses, not the thing, but the man, "l'Inglese", the curious individual who, ever since the Reformation, has been troubled intermittently by a moral consciousness of the conflict between absolute ideals and the practical ends which, by his nature, he is violently impelled to realize. Hence the famous English spirit of compromise, which is due to the Englishman's reluctance to admit any finality that is unpleasant. "There *must* be a way out", he says to himself, and he proceeds to try and find it—hence nearly all the achievements of our adventurous and ever hopeful

race. But when compromise fails in his soul, the Englishman is deeply troubled, and he becomes, in Dr. Pellizzi's words, an "intensely dramatic" character. His best forces are turned inwards and fight among themselves. These, says our author, are the periods most inwardly fruitful in English history, since in them the Englishman finds a refuge from mental discomfort in his imagination. Drama flourishes then, but dies away into decadence, as it did after the Restoration, when the effect of the sharp stimulus is blunted. In fact, English drama, like many other manifestations of a people that never grows old, is cyclic in its rhythm.

This book studies the latest cycle, which begins at the end of the nineteenth century, when the British middle class, at the height of its power, "undertook a great, radical criticism of itself. . . . It put to itself questions to which it could give no answers that did not ring with the negation of its criterions, its principles and its fortunes." It had reached the dramatic point; and the moral discomfort that revived the English drama was, according to Dr. Pellizzi, social remorse. Ibsen was its prophet, and Mr. Shaw, who untiringly prepared Ibsen's ways in this country, became the greatest English dramatist of the cycle. Beside him, in the great days of the "aggressive and militant" theatre, wrought Hankin, Galsworthy, Harold Chapin, Mr. Granville Barker and many lesser heroes of the provincial repertory movement. Flanking this main body marched the champions of the new Irish theatre, revolutionary for a different reason. And glory also came from those who, instead of forcing the moral discomfort into drama, found what Dr. Pellizzi observes is the typical

English outlet of fantasy—the eternal child in the Englishman's heart inventing a prettily possible to distract him from the ugly real. Hence Sir James Barrie and the Poet Laureate, Mr. Yeats, Lord Dunsany, J. E. Flecker and Mr. Drinkwater, and the greatest of them is the first. Then came the war, when the first impetus was already giving out, and after the war an utter overturning of the fortunes of the middle class, which meant that the cycle was closed more quickly than usual and, the old militant certainty having disappeared, abruptly petered out. The days we live in are no longer dramatic or heroic; and the concept of personality, so essential to true drama, is being undermined by the doctrines of psycho-analysis and group-psychology. It is time for a new cycle to begin.

Such is the general outline of Dr. Pellizzi's picture. I suggest that it is largely true and extremely interesting. With his judgements on individual dramatists there may be occasional disagreement, although, to my mind, his criticisms of Shaw, Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, Eugene O'Neill and Sean O'Casey are just and penetrating, and his chapter on the Irish theatre is admirable. But, above all, I believe his book is valuable for its treatment of the main theme—the grandeur and decadence of the British middle class as reflected in their drama. This study of the light thrown by fifty years of drama on the recent history of our "*grande e terribile popolo*" shows a true historical insight, besides great knowledge and kindly appreciation: and it provokes thought, an ever useful function in the world of to-day.

ORLO WILLIAMS

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I

AB OVO: ENGLISH CHARACTER THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The Church and the Bible · The birth of Anglo-Saxon morals, art and culture · The drama of the middle classes

THE holy St. Augustine, after having tried to spread the precepts of Rome and to instil a little order among those Anglo-Saxon chiefs on their barbaric island, who, rather than do nothing, even fought each other with stones, returned to Rome in an hour of discouragement. He said to Pope Gregory the Great that it was not worth trying again; the men over there were too sunk in their barbarism, and every trace of Rome was blotted out. In Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where the Celts remained, and where St. Patrick's teaching had laid roots, there continued a form of unconnected, mystical and individualistic monastic life, not adapted to overcome the rigours of that time, or perhaps of any other. Some Saxon chiefs in the north supported it for their own ends; a sort of Arianism seemed to be developing, out of place and out of season, and the messengers of Rome remained unheard.

The great Pope, an old Roman, could not conceive that men existed who were inconvertible, and sent Augustine back to Albion with his companions, strengthened with new instructions and a special benediction. "If at first you don't succeed" is a good motto, and this time St. Augustine

succeeded. He managed, at least, to lay the corner stones of an edifice which still to-day, after thirteen centuries, even though it may have altered some of its original spirit and form, has not wholly disappeared: the Church of England.

From this Church the early English kings acquired, besides the Latin alphabet, a class of persons who could read and write, and keep records of historical facts and administrative and judicial proceedings; they got a magistrature and the beginnings of a bureaucracy, councillors, ministers and government officials, not to speak of their moral and religious gains. They had a State, in fact, that entity and principle which overrides the armed power of a few men and the primitive customs of the tribe. It is strange to hear modern English historians and lawyers repeat that the Roman judicial tradition derives all authority from the monarchy, as from a cloud-girt god; and that modern English liberties, based on a law that is superior to everyone, even to the king, were an invention and a conquest gained through Parliament in the very face of Roman tradition. The spirit of all Roman law, and of the Roman tradition, taken by the Church since the earliest centuries, is just that of the *justitia* which is superior to every person, of the *salus rei publicae* which is paramount; and the most despotic and decadent of emperors, with all his official divinity, was still nothing more than the first servant of the republic. If St. Augustine suggested anything to King Ethelbert, it was just that concrete idea of the state as a moral principle, and not as a physical possession in the hands of a king. Also the idea of royalty by divine right, post-medieval and not catholic, had neither

origin, popularity, nor development in Italy; it reeks of barbarism. In conclusion, if the Anglo-Saxon race, with its successive Scandinavian influxes, was the liquid metal, the Church was the mould. The Archbishop of Canterbury was not only the first priest in the British Isles; he was also, if you look into it, the first magistrate, the first minister, and the supreme master of all intellectual activities.

Five centuries passed, then came the hubbub of the Norman conquest, yet all this not only survived, but was strengthened. Anselm of Aosta, who saw how things were going, tried to get out of the see of Canterbury with a most philosophical prudence; for that fiery king, William Rufus, would lead him a wretched life. Under the reign of his brother, Henry I, "the Clerk", came the first serious trouble between the molten material and the mould: the problem of investitures—a little trifle which accounted for several centuries of European history. But England is an island, and this nation with its kings had need of the Church, just as the Church, to be a Church, had need of them. Clay requires form no less than form requires clay; but the clay comes from one source and the form from another. Each material has its own spirit, as has every form, and they do not always agree; one cannot make a byzantine Christ out of majolica. One must either throw everything away and give up the work, or come to a compromise. The English made a compromise. It was the first; perhaps it was at the root of all the others. Perhaps it was the origin of Henry VIII's schism, the first source of the Anglican Church. I do not mean the particular episode, but the mentality that accepted it, and then made of it an example and a model.

Compromise is the important thing. It will remain as long as England remains in history, and it solves all the problems of the English enigma; even that of the drama, from Shakespeare to Shaw. English individualism, English civism, English imperialism, English optimism, English humorism, English sport and so on are so many indecipherable problems for those who are not familiar with this simple key. "I am the healthy, strong barbarian, you are the civilized decadent: give me your civilization and I will put my strength into it. I will not destroy you, if you do not abandon me. You will teach me, but I will learn the lesson and use it for my own ends. Let me command, and I will translate your teaching into acts." These unions and interweavings naturally make friction, and will do so eternally, not only in the outer things but also in the inner man. The inner Englishman is Saxon in race and instincts, but he has taken his religion and many other civil institutions from Rome, his Bible from the Jews, his foundations of political organism from the gallicized Normans, his culture from Athens, Rome and Paris: they are so many different souls, constrained to live together in one body. When they clash, then there is drama, there is Shakespeare; but as long as they succeed in living one beside the other, adapting and accommodating themselves, compromising one day only to make another compromise the next, then you get the ordinary Englishman, the man in the street.

The Bible was translated and began to circulate in England in the fifteenth century. The same thing happened elsewhere about this time, through analogous impulses, but here it became insularized, took on a special aspect and

had different developments. It was the time when the ruling classes in England still spoke French, of a sort; the priests, the friars and the scholars used Latin; the people did not speak, and for the most part did not understand, either language. They seized on the translated Bible with avidity, in order to find out finally from the consecrated text what Jesus and the Prophets had really said and done. England owes the originality of her language to the total ignorance of the people in the Middle Ages; between the Latin of the priests and scholars, and the bastard French of the nobles, the people developed and matured their own particular Saxon dialect, giving it an indelible imprint. Now the Bible, by passing into this language, consecrated it, and by means of it became perhaps the greatest factor in the moral and intellectual formation of England. Through the prism of the Old and New Testaments a new people opened their eyes to the life of the spirit. A union came to pass between the English spirit and the Bible; the former interpreted and assimilated the latter, giving it in the process a sense and colour of its own. All very great books have this virtue of being reborn, the same and yet different, in the various epochs and among the various peoples who study them. But the essential Catholic principle of unity among all Christians, past and future, which is the very life of Rome, was mortally threatened by this national and individual interpretation of the sacred text. There even grew up the legend, which still persists among the less educated English, that the Roman Church forbade the reading of the Bible.

On the other hand, as the Church still fulfilled many functions, not only religious, which were vital for the

nation and the state, the precursors of the Reformation, the "Bible readers" also often appeared as subverters of national and political order. In fact the dilemma seemed to be this: they had either to renounce authority, tradition, Christian unity, and the power of the king and the state, or those more intimate and jealously guarded germinating characteristics of the nation, together with the knowledge of the scriptures, of the words of Jesus and the Prophets. But there was already in the national character that expeditious and practical streak, which, when there is any doubt, makes the English want to get to the root of things, see with their own eyes, catch hold of a solution and not doubt any more. Doubt is a luxury which the English indulge in as little as possible; they tend to make a practical problem of every speculative one. So then, and ever afterwards, failing to understand the Latin of the priests, but deeply thirsting to be religious, they procured a translated Bible and made it a national bedside book. So they shut themselves up at home on Sundays, and read the translated Bible. They did not deny Rome, they did not deny the requirement of unity and universality which was innate in the same faith they had accepted. Not being able to compromise with Rome, they came to a compromise with themselves; they withdrew, they established the autonomy of their Primates, under the high protection of the king, and they collected and translated their prayer-book, from material already in use. This was the Anglican Church. The translated Bible figured beside the Magna Charta as a symbol of insular liberty. The contingency that caused this dissidence was that a king, for motives altogether private, asked for the annulment of a marriage, and a

pope, for motives entirely worldly and political, would not grant it.

When Henry VIII created the Anglican Church, cut off from the authority of the Popes, he also signed the death warrant of Charles I, who was executed by Cromwell less than a century later. If one can decapitate a dogma, *a fortiori* one can also decapitate a king. But the salient point, the exquisitely *English* fact to be indicated, is this: that Henry VIII did not really intend to amputate the unitarian body of the Christian Church, nor did Cromwell ever intend to destroy the monarchic principle. Henry VIII died in the persuasion that he was still a Catholic; and Cromwell, by necessity a republican in the most tumultuous period of his adventure, was before it a monarchist, and became one again as the result of it. Both, for an instant, had broken violently away from compromise, but their most intimate and keen desire was to re-enter it. Beneath their partial dissent from the principle of universality lay the longing for reconciliation with it; they flouted authority, tradition, universality and unity, but immediately afterwards they tried to repair the damage and to hide it, at any rate from themselves. In his last years Cromwell, seeing no other solution, thought of burdening himself with the crown; the High Church, half a century after its creation, tried with Archbishop Laud to give to itself and to impose on the country a religious régime of absolutism and exclusivism which had nothing to envy from Rome. The fact is not surprising, because it reflects an almost universal tendency among constituted religious bodies; what is surprising is that Laud's attempt thrived

in post-Elizabethan Protestant England. Equality of civil rights in the United Kingdom for those not professing the official religion was a victory not won till well into the nineteenth century, and for certain posts the barrier has remained up to our own day. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Lloyd George was the first Nonconformist Prime Minister in British history.

When the spirit of compromise enters into the bones of a people, and becomes the moral root of individual life, we no longer find the ordinary man we know, who nourishes ideas and universal ideals, but who sometimes adapts himself, with a sigh, to actual and political necessity. We have instead that specific, patented, moral figure, the Englishman. To accuse him of being slack, or a quietist, or indifferent, or cynical, or, worst of all, hypocritical, is a great mistake. The stereotyped charge of hypocrisy, which has long been dear to the hearts of anglophobes in all countries, is the one which reveals the greatest amount of incomprehension in those who bring it: but the English admit themselves that the foreigner must perform a remarkable feat of imagination if he wants to penetrate the moral essence of their people; and, as they consider their own imagination scanty, they easily forgive those who do not understand them. The typical Englishman is not at all an unctuous hypocrite, but rather a violent and firm man of action. When he has clearly seen a principle and a line of action, he goes for it with his head down: then, that point achieved, he will occupy himself with something quite different, with a variety and discontinuity of motives which will always cause a Latin considerable wonder, and provide occasion for easy irony.

It is not, then, that the Englishman does not feel the moral imperative; he feels it too much, and more than one imperative at a time. But, not being able to act according to two imperatives, probably contradictory, he establishes a compromise between the two, and acts according to that. To come to a conclusion, to realize, is the important thing for him. The only inconvenience is that his realization, drawing its spiritual, and therefore universal, validity from a provisional and empiric settlement of an ideal conflict, loses in the spiritual field what it gains in rapidity and efficiency. The Empire built to-day may fall to bits to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow the English will almost certainly construct a new one. It is also a salient fact that the English hardly ever produce the first conception of an Empire, but realize it more easily than others. Since William the Conqueror they have founded three, of which they rapidly lost the first two; but their genius reveals itself more in the empiric creation of realities and new situations than in the attainment of universal principles or the preservation of institutions: they therefore reveal the best of their vitality in epochs of depression and misfortune, when it is a question of doing something instead of continuing what has already been done.

When his interior compromise does not succeed, the Englishman becomes uneasy, and is an intensely dramatic character. His best forces are turned inwards instead of outwards, and fight among themselves. It is then that you find the most tormented and inwardly fertile periods of his history; you find him intent on producing philosophies, always a sign of discomfort with him; and his genius finds outlet and expression in the drama. If speculation and the

need of universality prevailed in him, he would not stop at the drama; he would burst into the lyric. But this is not the case: his internal drama can only discharge itself in compromise and action, and so long as this is not possible he finds a refuge and relief in fantasy, which, with the specious absoluteness of art, universalizes the moral conflict. The drama and the dramatic spirit of the Elizabethans blossomed forth when the greatest compromise, perhaps, in English history—that which closed its Middle Ages and began the modern epoch—was seething in the melting-pot before taking a definite shape. The great adventure of Cromwell and the Puritans had its artistic consecration in the epic-dramatic inspiration of Milton. The Restoration produced nothing, like almost all restorations, and from the Revolution Settlement of 1689 to the bloodshot dawn of the nineteenth century was the period of greatest solidification of all the ancient and modern compromises in British history; there was no drama then, only a placid neo-classical art, yielding at the most some vivacious and subtle stage satire, some agreeable pastime like the *Beggar's Opera*. In such an epoch everything tended towards the lyric, up to the last contemplative abandonments of a Gray or a Wordsworth, in which one already feels, in the melancholy of a dying age, the threatening wave of new times, new problems and new torments. The nineteenth century dawned confused and dramatic, although the dramatic element of its art hardly ever found the way to the stage; the middle classes of the industrial period were born Protestant and individualist, and their problems, before coming into the limelight of public life and causing colossal wars and revolutions, stirred for a long time in the

interior conscience of each individual; their historical crises were intimate and individual until the day when they became universal and definitive. This type of man mistrusted the theatre, which reminded him, at its best, of the liturgy and dogmas of a hostile faith, and, at its worst, of junketings in abandoned haunts. He read novelists and poets: alone before the open book in his safe, lonely house, he saw his drama transmute itself to fantasy and sublimate itself in art, and it was a relief to him. The theatre only regained a function and a real dramatic life towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the middle classes, dragged by their own activity and by the absorption of all past compromises to the culminating point in their adventure, could not hide their heads in the sand any longer; then the drama burst from its bonds on to the stage.

Thus the English are the most *moral* people existing, simply because the original *données* of their morality are contradictory and simultaneously present. This latent drama is found at the bottom of every true Englishman. The moral problem never leaves him. He, too, believes that good and evil come from above, and that grace is dispensed by an unknown law; but the authentic Englishman, when doing wrong, differs from the Latin in trying to provide himself with a moral justification. Perhaps an Italian is as easily persuaded of his superior intelligence as an Englishman of his superior morality; but the consequences are in favour of the Englishman, because the conviction of having understood is always the greatest obstacle to understanding; while the conviction of having acted morally does not prevent the moral problem

presenting itself just as acutely at the next combination of new contingencies.

A true Englishman is Liberal or Conservative according to family tradition, but in the depths of his soul he is always Liberal *and* Conservative. He is against the Pope, but himself always something of a pope at heart; he is papal and anti-papal at the same time. So for royalty—hands off the King! The Puritans had two centuries of political obscurity because they killed a king; meanwhile even their enemies learnt to copy them in many things. But when finally Queen Victoria, in the last century, had from above stamped an almost Puritan mode of life on English society, there began a general process of revolt against the spirit of puritanism.

If one king has been removed, the English always agree to install another; when another has been installed, they all agree to deprive him of authority; after that they will confer a vast authority on the king's ministers, but in the end not a day will pass without their piercing these ministers with fiery shafts of criticism. They each want, at the same time, the old and the new, the law and the sudden impulse, authority and free will; they want to be author, protagonist, antagonist and public all at once in the drama of their own life and surroundings. If the critical faculty warns them of the irreconcilability of these motives, they know they cannot be rid of it; but the critical faculty has in them a secondary importance, and therefore is not sufficient by itself to determine an interior storm. It causes instead that choppy sea and fresh breeze which are the characteristic English *humour*—an amused contemplation of their own contradictions and inequalities, inward or outward. Mean-

while this energetic will, although it may be contradictory and prone to compromise, is at work; it acts on the positive, transforming the terms in which its fundamental, eternal problem is presented, and sometimes it deludes itself into thinking it has changed the problem, when it has only changed the terms. But if you remove this disordered and fertile proceeding, you simply remove that England from which have sprung all the glories, and all the errors, of British history.

It has been observed that the Englishman succeeds easily in persuading himself of the moral reasons for his conduct. This fact is certainly not derived from insularity, or from the climate, or from other such obscure reasons. The Englishman finds a moral reason because he has the inveterate habit of looking for one; because he continually feels the necessity for one, even in face of difficult, thorny and almost desperate situations. He feels the necessity at least of justifying himself in his own mind in the moment of action; of feeling himself convinced, or of forming some equivalent for conviction, until the obstacle is overcome. When a Latin refuses to recognize a moral law in a certain order of positive facts, the Englishman frequently defines him as pessimistic and cynical (and he will privately think, decadent); but the Englishman in his turn possesses a rare capacity for ceasing to believe in his own "moral reasons" as soon as the action is completed and the expected results have been obtained. Every British conquest has been followed by the fall of those who desired and accomplished it, through a sort of obscure revulsion of the country's moral conscience, which seems to forget its defeats much

more easily than it digests its victories. English literature, from Shakespeare to Shelley, from Ben Jonson to Dickens, Thomas Hardy and Bernard Shaw, is one glorious gallery of witnesses who persist in declaring what minor men of politics strive vainly to dissemble or conceal, and what foreign diplomats must patiently rediscover before every new situation—the constant and prolific moral uneasiness of the Anglo-Saxon conscience. This uneasiness, this unclosed circle, this need of plenitude and absoluteness which has a vigorous rebirth after every frustration, is at the root of all English dramatic art, and accounts perhaps for most of the inspiration in British art and culture.

The Italians often renounce the *ideal* and the *absolute*, either through intellectual courage or through moral weariness. Dante declares that his divine Vision is nothing but a symbol; the symbol of a simple moral truth, rational but revealed. Our philosophers know no happy medium between the logical abstract and the historical concrete. Our men of action consider the highest ideal postulates as landmarks, at best, but never as possible goals. Our fancy, besides being small, has never been able completely to deceive us, and we have to make up with rhetoric. We know ignorance, but we never remain in doubt. Dante never doubted. The drama of Dante is therefore always a drama of certainties, a collision of immense, but determined and precise, realities; the drama itself does not change them: they blaze for all eternity.

Shakespeare, on the other hand, does not come to a standstill before opposites; he neither accentuates them nor harmonizes them; but after giving them a run, he *compromises them*, which is a manner of settling them in a

tertium quid. This third element, fluid, inconstant, unreal and not ideal but fantastic and mythical, is the kingdom of the possible. It is not life as it is, or life as it should be, but life as it *might* be, the empiric. Empiricism and fantasy join hands: they are the two parallel and allied ways of avoiding the stern dilemma of the real and the ideal; and the nordic races in general live outside this dilemma, in an atmosphere where everything is immediately feasible or distantly fabulous. Shakespeare was their greatest poet.

Perhaps the difference between these two spiritual types goes back to the twenty or more centuries of elaborate and conscious civilization which some races had, and others had not, rather than to differences of environment or racial constitution. The superimposition of the fruits of ancient civilizations on the still crude and childish character of new peoples has produced a surprising change in the dogmas slowly acquired from those civilizations. The ideals and principles which they had matured in their native lands reappear in a magic light, sometimes as grandiose and mythical, sometimes as cruel and absurd, but always as distant and strange, and not a little fantastic. If the new people possess a taste and a talent for universals, for theoretical elaborations, from which they cannot help also deriving axioms and practical principles, one gets Luther's Reformation and German philosophy; if instead they are distinguished by those subjective and individual virtues—initiative and fantasy, you get Shakespeare and English civilization. In the first case the old, different civilization is mastered, but in part destroyed; in the second case it is neither mastered nor destroyed, but, in the literal sense of the word, *compromised.*

Here perhaps we have found the mark, the origin and the measure of English humour. Once I gave the following definition of this humour, which I would not change to-day: a Mediterranean brain on top of a Nordic personality; the brain, observing the remaining personality, notes the discrepancies and smiles at them. It denotes a composite and discrepant individuality, which finds a good-natured and subtle amusement in displaying its own discontinuities; which delights in an attitude of indecision and doubt, as between the true and the false, the good and the evil, and which prefers to guide itself by the possible, the feasible and the empiric. Authentic humour does not even imply a judgement, or at best presumes a generic and optimistic one; it does not preach, or deplore or dispute; it accepts with pleasure even the incongruities of man, of life and of the world, because they lead to laughter; it seems almost to thank fate that things are not too perfect, because otherwise there would never be anything to laugh at. One finds few traces of this sort of humour outside England, and very few indeed in Italian literature; this can be explained, as well as by the facts already mentioned, by the insularity which has educated the English to a sense of the total security within their boundaries, and has maintained among them old customs and traditions which clash with the experiences of modern life. It can also be explained by that fairly long period of military victories, colonial conquests and economic growth which made Great Britain the greatest world power from the fall of Napoleon to the War. Here as usual Shakespeare anticipates, giving us a synthesis of what English wit was to produce in the future. We find in him both polemical and also meta-

physical clowning; we find models of pure nineteenth-century humour, and finally, especially in his last works, a contemplative, lyrical, fantastic and melancholy humorism which we would not be surprised to see flowering anew in England to-day, under the impulse of the changed, and much harder, conditions of existence, and under the influence of deeper and more decisive historical experiences. I should say, however, that all Shakespeare's humour was streaked with a vague contemplative melancholy; he is always the *fool*, the bizarre, detached and disenchanted contemplator and commentator; the tragedy and the comedy of human life touch him to the core, without his being able to totally identify himself with them; he seems to belong to a higher species, intermediate between God and man, and in the very heart of his humanity there always remains an unattainable corner, an observatory proof against the passions.

We must be careful not to confuse all this with the serenity of the Italian Renaissance, or to suppose it was derived from it. What characterizes a Machiavelli, a Guicciardini or an Ariosto is the clear possession of a philosophy of the real, even if unexpressed. Even Ariosto has his feet solidly planted on an earthly reality which is sufficient to itself, lucid and conscious in every part; he tells stories consciously, and laughs and stirs his emotions in the telling, while never losing sight of the distinction between fiction and truth; he hardly ever takes sufficient part to attain real drama, either in the sad episodes or the gay. The Elizabethans, and Shakespeare in the first place, are very far from adopting this attitude, which in its essence does not admit of the dramatic element. In them

the man, as such, is not yet defined or finished; he cannot "know himself" because that "self" is wholly engaged in a historical process of formation—a great adventure which traces the life of civilizations, and of which poets sing the principal episodes. In England this process has still not concluded its cycle. The English in general avoid all self-definitions which are not purely humorous, because they know their own changeable temperament, and want to spare themselves those total contradictions, which, after a total definition, never fail to occur; sometimes they even maintain that a mentality so composed is an indispensable condition to a superior civilization. . . .

Great and terrible people, who never are, and never want to be, clear about anything or convinced of anything, except of some determinate thing, whatever it may be, which they are actually doing.

If the preceding lines have any value as an effort to interpret some of the more general aspects of the British mind, in the present volume we shall have to consider in particular the interests and motives which belong to the so-called middle classes; it is difficult to approach my subject without a continual use of this phrase. But it has by now been so widely used, abused and distorted from its many true historical significations, that it is impossible to enter on our subject-matter without first trying to give an idea, however summary, of what is meant by the "modern English middle classes", and by their "historical drama".

In Italy, during the Middle Ages, the *borghese* was the man who lived in the *borgo* or village near the castle; he was a workman, merchant, innkeeper, a freed servant, a client

of the lord, a minor vassal or some other person of little importance. He was freer than the villein, but subject to some sort of jurisdiction from the ruler of the castle. In the ancient commune, on the other hand, the *borghese* had no distinguishing mark; if a consular class of nobles ruled, he was the People, and considered himself different from, and superior to, the peasants; but he gained a sharp economic profile in the advanced industrial community, where he belonged to the rich and privileged guilds, and thus became a ruling class. But the distinctions of class, which under the rule of force were sacred and sharply defined, and answered in some way to social and political powers and functions, under the rule of gold became confused and lost their precise content. Just as the rule of the feudatories in Italy was short, local and disputed, so, not only in Italy but elsewhere, the rule of the rich middle classes was sporadic and of short duration. The rule of the *Signorie*, which matured the principle and the idea of the modern state, tended to level all the subjects, whatever class or vocation they belonged to, and laid the foundations of successive democracies. The nobility, apart from privileges of etiquette and, sometimes, of public office, ended legally and morally, if not socially, by confusing itself with the other classes. From the roots of the old and wise bourgeoisies and citizen nobilities sprang new shoots in the shape of those scholars and reformers who in the eighteenth century guided the enlightened princes on the path of reform. Thus Italy has a fragmentary, troubled feudal tradition, vitiated with exoticism and unpopularity; she has instead a deep-rooted and continuous tradition of citizen and middle-class government, which may be said

to have continued without interruption since the beginnings of the present millennium.

Almost exactly the contrary is true of England. The Norman conquest put the whole island, as far as the boundaries of Scotland, in the power of a single feudal class, that of the invaders, men of Scandinavian origin, but already deeply latinized. Even the clergy, especially in the higher positions, came to be replaced by French, and sometimes Italian, elements. Thus, in a country where for centuries only Saxons and Danes had ruled or raged, the establishment of Norman feudalism brought back elements of Latin civilization. But the extreme Norman feudalism slowly developed, in itself and by itself, all that was to render possible an entirely new civilization, in most respects opposed to feudalism. History seems to love the play of sharp antitheses, and produces the most fertile developments from those régimes which can be defined as totalitarian, a word much in use to-day. The House of Commons, "Mother of Parliaments", first arose as a collection of agents and exactors of taxes or tributes which the king levied on the whole country by virtue of his eminent feudal dominion. It was a bureaucratic organ, therefore, in a rather vague sense, but certainly not an expression of any sort of popular guarantee. In time the agents became counsellors, esteemed and finally necessary collaborators; beyond and above the class of nobles, it is they who were the link between the king and the lesser landed proprietors, between the king and the old and new towns with their privileges. In the eighteenth century, although for the most part the old nobility still governed, they governed chiefly by means of the Commons, using an

anachronistic distribution of seats and outworn electoral privileges. In 1832, with electoral reform, the House of Commons became the great political weapon for the affirmation of the new industrial capitalism; and now, when everyone has the vote, it is losing every day a little of its prestige and also its effective functions. The general crisis of the middle classes strikes at the heart of Parliament, which tries to understand the new times, to control them or follow them, always with moderate success.

The industrial revolution in England dates perhaps from the day when the spinning jenny was invented. That which had been for centuries the greatest English family industry thus became mechanized, extended and overthrown. It was the time when David Hume criticized the principle of causality, and when Gray composed the first great romantic elegy in a country churchyard. In the same period other Englishmen invented or perfected steam engines, and the great industrial exploitation of the coal, and then the iron, deposits began; shipbuilding, another large and ancient national industry, also became mechanized, and the machine supplanted the workman. Events of little notice but of great importance; in the midst of which, when one looks at them in the light of to-day, the Napoleonic troubles seem to be the game of a mischievous child who throws the house in confusion, but does not alter the ultimate destinies of its inhabitants.

Industry on a mechanical basis brought in its train economy on a credit basis, and limited companies in particular; it de-personalized economic life, eliminating in great measure the moral, political and moreover historical responsibility of its chiefs. It rendered the latter indefinable

and impossible to find; it gave to money a maximum of power and a minimum of responsibility; it made wealth a fluid, impersonal, unnational, almost unhuman thing; it dissociated the greatest reasons of power from even the smallest principles of duty. The class which this wave of new circumstances brought to the heights of power was, especially outside England, a historical *product* and not a determinating force: for man was never so little master of his own destiny, so essentially unfree, as in this century.

In England, however, industrialism found a class, distinguished by traditions and mental and moral habits, which was ready to receive it, and which in some way transfused into it its own morality, with its values and defects. They were the descendants of the Puritans, the Quakers and the Nonconformists, the progenies of the Huguenots who had immigrated two centuries before; having escaped the persecutions before the Roundhead revolution, having lived a life of civil minority after the Restoration, upholders of William of Orange, protected by Walpole who made their more or less masked alliance one of the bases of Whig politics, these people had come to the beginning of the nineteenth century without being admitted to the universities, without the full enjoyment of all civil and political rights, without ever occupying any high position in the state. They had no military traditions, except those of the Cromwellian period, neither were the majority possessors or cultivators of lands; the Anglican, traditionalist country squire, always conservative even if he did not belong to the Tory party, was generally their fierce antagonist. They dedicated themselves to industry, commerce and finance; they often had friends and relations in

America or in farther colonies, with whom they preserved business and intellectual relations, drawing from them an inducement to persevere in their narrow observance of Calvinistic principles, or in a rigorous Protestantism.

The industrial revolution, after a few decades, brought this class into the limelight of economic, and soon after also political, life. They left their mark on the new middle classes, and communicated to them their stubborn fidelity to religious and moral dogmas, their scruples of contractual honesty, their narrowness and provincialism, and their hostile insensibility towards all values, which sprang from general artistic and spiritual coarseness. The whole island, so to speak, veered decidedly to the north, and kept that course for a century. But here the middle classes born of industrialism had found, as they had not in other countries, a religion and a tradition of well-defined human characters. For this reason, and through fortunate material circumstances, they were much stronger here than elsewhere; for over half a century they appeared invincible, and ruled in all spheres. First they copied and then assimilated the nobility and the great land-owning squirearchy; they imposed ideas, feelings, habits, a code of conduct and morality on the masses. They put their stamp on nearly all public and private institutions, on legislation and even on religion: they transformed everyday life, dress and tastes. They rose finally to the palace, where in Queen Victoria they found a sovereign who understood them, and who, without losing her own majesty, without any infringing of ceremony, itself so dear to middle-class snobbery, regulated at least the exterior life of the highest social spheres with a prudish austerity, somewhat feminine, which accorded very well

with the Puritan instincts of the new rulers. Perhaps it was the first time for many centuries that the court and the people found themselves expressing the same view of life.

A determinate social class has rarely, throughout history, attained such complete triumph. Nor was it victorious only within the country, for the Victorian middle classes triumphed in the boundless colonies, and abroad: their internal policy, their standards of life, were taken as models everywhere, and came to be considered as perfect and insuperable ideals by other nations, especially those politically younger. Money, no matter how it was obtained, flowed in plenty to the banks of London from the furthest parts of the globe: the enrichment of England went on sumptuously and continuously until the Great War.

But the sons of the new rich were now going to the university, and an ever-growing number of persons was acquiring a consciousness of the true traditions of British life, both insular and extra-insular. The jealous morality of the Nonconformists, dulled by affluence of wealth for one generation, rose up again in the following one; this new generation, more cultivated, better off, and rather spoiled, subjected its parents to an aesthetic, political and moral indictment; sometimes it applied this indictment to all the civilization of which it felt itself a privileged and profiting part. Continental doctrines, such as Marx's *Capital*, which was moreover thought out and written in England, did not take much hold there; the English problem could not be faced except with English mentality, and on its own characteristic, and in part unique, terms. So these victorious middle classes, with a kind of aristocratic dignity and want of prejudice, instituted an extensive,

radical criticism of themselves; and, having lived in material success, prepared to die with intellectual and artistic honours. In other words, after having reached the height of their power, they began to acquire a sense of their limits; they noticed in themselves the presence of an offended, adverse and diverse God. They asked themselves questions which they could not answer without denying their criteria, their principles and their fortunes. They reached, in fact, that point at which the daemon of a civilization is naturally dramatic; and their drama showed itself in the novel and on the stage.

II

THE MIDDLE CLASSES AT THE THEATRE

The dark hour of the drama · The middle classes look at themselves · From Robertson to Jones · Pinero and others · Middle-class amusement

IN 1787 the royal theatre of Covent Garden was enlarged, and five years later reconstructed. Drury Lane underwent the same fate, at the same period. Historians of the English stage, ready, as the English always are, to find an empiric reason for a spiritual fact, record these architectural changes in the two greatest London theatres, and present them as one of the causes of the decline into which English dramatic production fell for almost a hundred years, until the close of the nineteenth century. They maintain that the greater distance between the actors and audience rendered necessary a different technique, both of acting and of composition and production: greater and simpler effects, thundering voices, and a bold, effective *mise en scène*—favourable conditions, in fact, for melodrama, but impossible for fine and delicate drama. Thus the melodramatic form was forced on authors and poets, allying itself with the worst medievalistic, sentimental and picturesque extravagances of current romantic taste.

But what were the causes of this cause, and why were the theatres enlarged? Why also, if the old character comedy and other finer eighteenth-century productions

had authors and a public behind them capable of keeping them alive, did they not survive in some little theatre, however modest and secluded, which could flourish beside the big official theatres? It is true that the permission to open new theatres was not easily granted, and that only the two theatres mentioned above had the patent for dramatic productions; but a keen interest in a certain sort of spectacle, coming from an organized public, always ends by being satisfied. The real cause of all the evil was this—that the evil existed already. The decline of the English comic and tragic drama was continuous and progressive from the first decades of the eighteenth century onwards. The Elizabethan stage, a platform projecting into the middle of the pit, which created a kind of intimacy between actors and audience, justified asides and the simultaneous acting of different groups, rendered monologues more natural, and simplified scenic arrangements, had disappeared, and was replaced by the modern proscenium, a species of frame surrounding a living picture. Thus a breach, never healed again, was made between the stage and the public. But this breach was the true cause, and the new architecture of the theatres only one of its effects, if that. The altered, and now disharmonized, relations between author, actors and public only signified that the moral and social function of the old theatre was exhausted. It could only arise again in wholly new times, amid new conditions, in face of new needs. The theatre now became nothing but a pastime, a meeting-place for gentlemen and ladies of fashion, for rakes and courtesans, and for the noisy, idle mob which is found in all large towns.

The new middle classes had no culture or artistic ideal

of their own; they held the theatre in suspicion as the residue of a worldliness and a culture against which their elders had fought. The richer ones, who tried to ennoble themselves by imitating the noble or land-owning families, aped the mentality and the culture of these—a mentality and culture now worn out and sterile, for when a class loses its historical function it cannot help beginning to lose its spiritual one. It was thus with the metropolitan nobility, great supporters of the theatre in the two preceding centuries, and now politically confused, morally divided and corrupt. On the other hand, the minor country gentlemen continued to be a very important class, both politically and in the intellectual and moral life of the country, until the beginning of this century, when they received the *coup de grâce* from the radical Liberalism of Lloyd George. This class was to play its part in the growth of the realistic provincial drama at the end of the nineteenth century, but at the time of which we speak, it was, in this respect, subordinate to the nobility and to the town populations. In view of this, we can perhaps exempt ourselves from considering another supposed cause of the dramatic decline in the nineteenth century—the moral and political censorship of performances, instituted by Walpole at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This, at the most, was a concomitant factor of the decline, and not its cause; as can be seen clearly to-day, when censorship survives, and is not at all an obstacle to the flowering of dramatic art, although it is sometimes an impediment, not always harmful, to certain more daring innovations.

Simultaneously with this decline of the drama, romantic taste was becoming popular; which, having been born

together with all sorts of new ideas about the liberty, dignity and creative autonomy of art, saw these ideas survive it, and was already far gone in decay when they began to triumph, so to speak, officially. It is necessary, therefore, to keep the two things distinct, and to note that by "romantic" is intended here only that current of artistic taste in Europe which began in the eighteenth and ended, or nearly ended, in the nineteenth century. This romantic taste had a devastating success in the nineteenth century, among the new middle classes; but it would be an error and an anachronism to call them the fathers of Romanticism, just because they suffered it so passively. Romanticism is rooted in, and dovetailed with, movements that preceded it; and the most that one can say is that in its doctrinaire, liberal and humanistic aspect it was born from the same instincts and impulses, from the same conditions and exigencies, as produced democracies in the nineteenth century. The middle classes limited themselves to accepting the fashionable taste of the moment, making it coarser and more cut-and-dried, and taking hold of those moderately humanistic and liberal ideas, joined to a vague mysticism, which best pleased their mentality and their controversial needs. They failed to establish these ideas as lasting principles of life and thought, because middle classes, being born from money, always fail to establish lasting principles. But that is another question.

This romantic taste introduced itself first on the English stage as a popular and melodramatic corruption of many ancient forms, including even the noblest. Shakespeare's plays were revised, with the excuse of adapting them to the modern theatre; songs and jokes were inserted, plots were

simplified or changed, characters and scenes were cut out, and so on, with considerable public success. As usual when it is decadent, the theatre sought only to satisfy the eye and the ear, and fell into the spectacular pure and simple; new theatrical forms arose such as the "water melodrama", with little lakes and waterfalls on the stage, not to speak of choruses, dances, nudity and the rest. All that was most dissolute and licentious in the not impeccable London life of that time let itself loose in the balconies and the pit. It is natural, therefore, that the severer and more solid part of the middle classes should abstain from going to the theatre, and that the best writers should prefer to dedicate themselves to the composition of dramas to be read only. But these closet plays all serve to demonstrate more or less that one cannot trifle with the theatre: dramatic form must go with dramatic inspiration, must be adopted with a view to a real performance and for a given public. For the most part, the poets of the reading drama wrote their worst poetry in this form, yet they failed to succeed as dramatists. It is also to be observed that they succeeded better, from the dramatic point of view, when they kept away from the sheerly romantic types and tastes. Walter Savage Landor is more surely tragical in *Count Julian* (1812) than in the romantic historical trilogy of Giovanna of Naples or in *The Siege of Ancona*. It is the same with Shelley in *The Cenci* (1820); and at the same period Byron wrote the best group of his dramatic works, which are those least similar to German romantic models: *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari*. The macabre vein, which came or returned *with* Romanticism, though it is still to be proved that it was necessarily derived *from* Romanticism, also

found an outlet here, mainly in the works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes: *The Bride's Tragedy* (1822) and *Death's Jest Book* (posthumous, 1857), which others would define as sadistic. Some, such as Richard H. Horne, achieved some literary merit in imitating and recalling the Elizabethan drama, chiefly of Shakespeare and Marlow. The authentic dramatic element is lacking in all his plays, but they abound in lyrical, and sometimes epic, inspiration. Only among the later romantics, if Browning can be defined as such, does the dramatic spark appear again; his *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), especially, reveals originality of dramatic intuition and a lively sense of passion and strife. But Browning also, like nearly all his greatest contemporaries, found himself in a difficulty when attempting drama: what he had to give was not wanted, and there was just the lack of that understanding between author and public which, in the drama, I have already said to be essential. Was it all the fault of the public? No: because it remains to be shown that this writer was a dramatist at all and not rather a lyrist capable of dramatic moments and intuitions. It is not by chance that his richest dramatic work, *The Ring and the Book*, is not in dramatic form. Later Swinburne, with *Chastelard* and *Mary Stuart*, produced two poetical dramatic works on a historical theme, like nearly all those mentioned above, in which dramatic values also crop up; and as extreme decadence always carries the seeds of renewal, so Swinburne, who belongs to the last phase of the romantic cycle, reveals new tendencies, not speculative and lyrical like Browning's, but epically sensual; he makes one think of a fertile, fermenting soil, from which something new may spring up.

As a whole this poetical nineteenth-century drama has a reflective, cultured, *literary* vitality—a vitality not therefore very theatrical, and hardly ever entirely dramatic. It was not revived towards the end of the century by the vast courtly, pedagogic and patriotic dramas of Lord Tennyson, who was very much the Poet Laureate even on the stage. Nor has it been revived by the reiterated and melancholy attempts of the too numerous writers who, even in our century, still patch together poetical dramas on historical or quasi-historical themes. With Yeats and Masefield the poetical drama acquired again a certain meaning and a certain life, but with a new spirit and new intentions.

More modest in pretensions, the spectacular drama, the melodrama and the farce flourished in the last century, without exceeding those conventional and grossly popular limits which bind them. If the poetical-historical drama had sprung chiefly from German models and influences, the melodrama was, as it still is in part, derived from Italy, while the more or less farcical comedy came from France. Translations and adaptations from the French were innumerable: simple lively affairs, in which even a little slightly *risqué* realism and a crumb of satire on the times were tolerated, because at the worst they could be reckoned against the French, who were never very popular across the Channel. There were characters who had beautiful aristocratic titles, and pompous interiors, which gratified the snobbery of the new class; there was an exotic atmosphere, in harmony with the romantic taste, in which a vein of exoticism is never lacking. Finally there were no authors' rights to pay, which pleased the managers enormously. There was Planché, for instance, with his extravaganzas, a

kind of miscellaneous theatrical hotch-potch, not wholly original, which in a sense preceded the modern revue; and his *Vampire, or the Bride of the Isles*, an exotic mixture of sentiment and horror. But the great master of these clever theatrical manipulations was Dion Boucicault, an Irishman, who ransacked history, legend, the Elizabethans, the French, the classics and everything he could think of, and produced a long series of pieces with certain and immediate appeal. He had what the poets had not, a sense of the stage and fertility of scenic invention: he was even sometimes witty. Art was the only thing he had not. However, in 1841, when hardly twenty, he had produced a farcical comedy, *London Assurance*, in which the characters and situations were contemporary and English, with some hint of realism and satire. The comedy, produced fairly well at Covent Garden, had a success, although it very soon attracted the irony of Thackeray and other writers in *Punch*, who as a matter of fact would not have been capable themselves of putting on the stage even the clownish and somewhat conventional modern comedy of Boucicault. But the latter did not persevere; although in 1843 the legal restrictions that favoured the patented theatres were removed, and the way was therefore opened to all kinds of dramatic experiments, the public was not ripe to support a *modern, middle-class* drama.

Boucicault dedicated himself, with great success, to the sort of adaptations and arrangements of which we have spoken. He then left for America, where he produced in 1859, when the air was full of civil war, a sensational drama which had as its setting the southern plantations cultivated by negroes, as heroine a victim of racial differences, and as

emotional basis this problem which then tormented the whole of America. The play, *The Octoroon*, had a great success, and is recognized as one of the milestones in the development of modern American drama. Boucicault also produced in America various plays on popular, realistic Irish subjects, addressing them successfully to the large population of Irish immigrants. These works came to be performed later also in Ireland, and there too they had the effect of stimulating the interest of a public, and of drawing many writers towards the drama, thus initiating and encouraging another movement which was to produce eminent results a few decades later. This conventional and melodramatic, but fertile and intensely theatrical writer, is thus found at the origin of all the three great branches of modern Anglo-Saxon drama: the English, the American and the Irish.

With less imagination and originality than Boucicault, but following similar methods, Tom Taylor produced an incalculable number of plays of various kinds, for the most part adapted from novels and short stories or translated and adapted from the French. This continual flow lasted for several years, completely swamping the English stage, and we shall see later how long and difficult was the work of reclamation. These two were the monopolists of "theatricality" for some decades; many others imitated them more feebly. Sydney Grundy may be mentioned, a clever anglicizer of French fashions and author of some original dramas, not without value; and F. Anstey, more recent, but not so very different in manner and spirit, an author of gay, pleasant farces, some in cockney dialect, which from time to time are still performed to-day. There

are others who need not be mentioned, because we have now said enough about this pseudo-drama, which when it was artistic was not adapted to the stage (and often not even dramatic), and when it was successful on the stage was hardly ever artistic. It is more important to record how England, or at least her best and most representative part, managed to emerge from it.

She emerged from it because the new middle classes began to feel curious about themselves. They began to contemplate themselves and to consider themselves objectively. It was a great sign and a great phenomenon, of fundamental historical importance. It signifies, to use the words of Vico, that this new class had passed, or was about to pass, beyond its epic and mythical period, and was entering a dramatic and heroic period. This second period is one which is nearly always of short duration, but is intensely productive in the sphere of art. In this case the novel had forestalled the drama in many respects; a natural occurrence, because, as has been already observed, this new class was individualistic, inclined to solitary reading, and had in its veins an atavistic and dogmatic suspicion of public amusements and theatrical fictions. But there is also this to be considered: if anything, the novel is the confession of an author, while the drama is also the confession of a public. The drama is a dialogue; even if one of the interlocutors is silent, he is present, and is co-essential with the performance. Even if the public does not at once and loudly disapprove, it can kill a work by indifference or by staying away. There is no example in history of a theatrical work which has had a great success in print without having first enjoyed notable success on the stage. On the other

hand there exist many books, not of drama, whose success has been slowly affirmed in the course of years, and sometimes of centuries.

The middle classes began, then, to feel curious about themselves and also about their own works and that ordering of society which had come about through their rise to power. Before they could see, clearly and dramatically, the contrast between their traditional, moral, religious and political ideals and the state of things which they themselves had brought about, it was necessary that their enthusiasm for their own affranchisement should simmer down, that their faith in their own mythology should wane, and that they should lose interest in criticizing the old privileged classes. It was also necessary that their snobbish passion for nobility, a common characteristic of this class as of all the other classes in history founded on economic superiority, should be deflated by a series of dramatic works, of which some will interest us.

The first attempts to represent contemporary people and affairs on the stage, with more or less realistic and polemical intentions, are lost in the poetic and melodramatic hotch-potch of the early nineteenth century, which has already been mentioned. James Sheridan Knowles, an author better known for poetical historical plays typical of this period, wrote *The Hunchback*, a comedy in verse, in 1832. Boucicault's *London Assurance*, mentioned above, was written in 1841. In 1842 John Westland Marston wrote *The Patrician's Daughter*, a drama in which the conflict between the various classes is already felt and presented with a certain frankness and liveliness. In 1838 Bulwer-Lytton had presented to the public *The Lady of*

Lyons, a romantic drama of broad effects, which contains among other things a quasi-satirical portrayal of middle-class snobbery. The author had prudently laid the scene in France, among French characters, but the situation presented, that of a rich middle-class family who want to marry their only daughter to a nobleman, obviously applied to certain categories of the new rich in England. With *Money* and *Not as Bad as We Seem* Lytton tried to pursue and vary this idea, but without great success. On the whole, his fame as a dramatist is better justified by his works on historical themes, *Richelieu* and *Walpole*, and he has the merit of having used with more taste, imagination and intelligence the common theatrical stock-in-trade of his time.

A quarter of a century must be passed over before reaching the first plays on contemporary social themes by Thomas W. Robertson: *Society* (1865), *Ours* (1866) and especially *Caste* (1867). English historians are fond of tracing to these works, which were previous to the wave of Ibsenism, the origins of the realistic and controversial English drama of to-day, and also of the reform in technique and the change in theatrical mentality which has accompanied them. But it must be said that Robertson was chiefly an unconscious reformer; he broke away in a more or less new direction, but perhaps never clearly realized the great developments to which it could lead. A poor and needy actor himself during the first period of his life, he may have obtained from the French the idea of a drama which would adhere to contemporary life, and which would make appeal to the common experiences and sentiments of the middle classes, now so powerful in the life of

the country. He anticipated modern opinion regarding the theatrical customs and fashions of his time, because he was gifted with a critical sensibility, and because he, a poor, obscure actor, humiliated by the success of the great stage stars who knew how to play to the gallery, exaggerating conventional effects, could see and feel better than anyone else the absurdity of their method, and the falsity of their traditions. Here too, in Robertson's soul, the realistic impulse sprang from a gesture of protest, criticism and denial—a common characteristic of all nineteenth-century middle-class realism in all the different countries and under the most varied forms of expression. It was the younger sons of the middle classes, the disinherited, sometimes their victims, who now looked them in the face, and judged them in the very name of those ideal principles through which they had conquered. From this point of view the controversial realism of the period, in the drama and in other artistic manifestations, is a phenomenon similar and psychologically parallel to the socialistic criticism which began to show itself about the same time, and which is also without a moral basis, if those historical-political and moral criterions are not accepted, in the name of which the middle classes triumphed. We shall see, however, how the middle-class English theatre has passed beyond this phase, and has reached a higher dramatic conception, based on a keen sympathy with the real passions and the real problems of men.

But this was to be the ultimate phase in a process which with Robertson was in its first uncertain stages. Let us examine *Caste*, his most successful play. An aristocratic young man, an officer in the army, has married a chorus

girl; then, having gone to India with his regiment, he disappears in a frontier skirmish. His mother is a terrible marchioness, a conventional and stiff-necked type, very proud of her descent from Norman and crusading ancestors, and refuses to recognize the supposed widow and her baby, who live with the widow's father. It is a poor workman's home, in which the drunken old father is used to counterbalance the marchioness, and is meant to be a realistic and satirical portrayal of the vices of the lower class. To tell the truth, this old toper, whom drink and hunger have made a rogue, is really a stock figure from popular scenes in dialect, more effective than artistic. Of the other characters the critics observed that they were, at last, individuals and types; but it may be argued that the aim of art is to create individuals who immediately become types. Robertson has partly freed himself from the conventional, empty types of the old drama, but he has, as a rule, put nothing in their place but individuals. His realism, if one can call it such, is more photographic than artistic. He also accedes to the popular demand for a happy ending; the lost officer unexpectedly returns, amidst general reconciliation. Nor does he hesitate to appeal to the sentimentality of the gallery, whenever the plot offers an opportunity. He succeeds in asserting himself before a public used to melodramatic emotions, simply by exciting analogous emotions by means of contemporary subjects. The action is lively, showing the writer to have expert knowledge of the needs and resources of the stage; but the dialogue falls very often into the conventional and ingenuous. The moral of the fable seems to end in a general *embrassons-nous*, disregarding all differences and prejudices

of caste, but this was not Robertson's real intention, or his hidden thought. He preaches, if anything, sympathy and charity between people of different caste, every time that a *mésalliance* happens of the type that forms the basis of the play; he wants to teach us that admirable characters exist in all classes, capable of loving one another. But he is also profoundly convinced, as a general rule, that the people should stay with the people, the middle class with the middle class, the nobility with the nobility. The middle classes, for whom the play was intended, and who continued to applaud it for over a generation, agreed perfectly to this species of compromise between a general rule and a particular fact. Evidently the spirit of middle-class realism had not yet come to maturity in society, or in the public mind, and the middle classes still felt themselves one class among others; they liked to contemplate their own virtues and others' defects, in order to reassert their own rights and aspirations. It was necessary that the middle classes should feel that they had conquered, that they had assimilated to themselves all society, all surrounding life, before beginning to notice their own drama and wanting to express it on the stage. Robertson continued his career for some years without changing his style of play: *School* (1869) was among the best of the last period. He died still young, after having tasted ease and success for a few years. Almost a decade was to pass before the first works of Pinero and Jones appeared.

These first works were not the most significant. The ten years from 1885 to 1895 were mainly characterized by a revival of old genteel, society humours, and by repeated invasions of the stage, via Paris, by manners and tastes

characteristic of the final romantic decadence, which found a ready welcome in artistic temperaments such as those of Swinburne and Wilde. The richer members of the middle classes could no longer build castles as they did in the days of medieval communes, but they married the daughters of nobles, or gave their own daughters to the latter with a sumptuous inheritance; in the growing and continuous abundance of wealth, the luckiest ones, instead of acquiring class-consciousness, lost it in copying what remained of the manners and tastes of the old nobility. But at the same time, in a different set of persons, more cultivated, less conspicuous and for the most part considerably less rich, the notions, moods and humours of Ibsenism were maturing. There were two currents which flowed parallel, and the drama gained from both. The one, which was more clearly to stamp social life at the end of the century, leading to the ironical expression "The Naughty 'Nineties", was illustrated first in the humour of Gilbert's operettas, and then in the witty extravagances and moral paradoxes of Wilde; the other, following the path laboriously made by Robertson, was enriched, almost a decade later, by the first works of Jones, Pinero and other minor writers, who were formed before the influence of Ibsen made itself felt, although they also came to be affected by this force, which dominated all drama at the end of the nineteenth century.

Henry Arthur Jones, of obscure provincial origin, began life as a commercial traveller. Attracted by the theatre, he produced first a few little comedies, such as *Only Round the Corner* (1878); in 1882 he acquired wealth and popularity with a long and successful melodrama, *The Silver King*,

written in collaboration. This work reveals an already perfect technical knowledge of the stage, and a clever intuition of public taste. But Jones had the courage to burn his boats, and not to content himself with this kind of success. In 1884 he produced an English adaptation of *The Doll's House*, entitled *Breaking a Butterfly*. Among other things he altered the conclusion of the play, giving it a happy ending; this should be enough to make us realize how far he was from the true spirit of the great Norwegian dramatist. Ibsenism was really nothing for Jones but an incentive to persevere in the way he had already taken. In Ibsen, one might say, it is the story that imposes its moral on the author and on the public; Jones has a moral of his own to impose on the story. A lower middle-class provincial, English to the bone, and Non-conformist in tendency (I do not know if also in practice), he was the most typical dramatist of the new British middle classes, at the moment in which, without yet abandoning any of their ideals and principles, they began to contemplate and judge themselves. *Saints and Sinners*, also written in 1884, is laid in provincial surroundings, among the sordid, shopkeeping, lower middle class, bound to a hypocritical and empty puritanism, formalist in their religion and avaricious and unjust in their life. If one looked at the play as a modernized melodrama, these would be the villains of the piece. Then there is a heroine who is seduced and dies, and a high-minded lover who arrives in time to vow his eternal love, in spite of what has happened. This heroine is the daughter of the Vicar, and everything takes place against the parish background. All this was quite enough for the play to cause a scandal and

let loose controversy. Jones defended himself and counter-attacked in print, proclaiming "the new liberty of the theatre", and in 1890, after *Judah*, he declared that the dramatist must treat "the great realities of modern life".

The whole of *Judah* is based on the superstition of an Irish village, where a girl, in reality a common hysterical type, is reputed to be a faith-healer; it is then discovered that she is only the unconscious instrument of the father, who speculates on the supposed miracles. The drama turns on Judah Llewellyn, the protagonist, a Nonconformist minister of the same village, who, besides being in love with the girl, has faith in her supernatural power; in the end he renounces this belief, recognizing however the girl's almost angelical virtue.

These forms of superstition, still so current among Anglo-Saxons, are so strange to the Latin temperament that Italians do not succeed in understanding Judah, or in sympathizing with him for a single moment; for them the dramatic situation never comes to life. They would have much the same impression of *Michael and his Lost Angel* (1896), which was not a success, but which Jones considered as his tragic masterpiece. This also is an ecclesiastical and Nonconformist drama. Michael is a fervent young minister, who has re-instituted oral confession before the congregation. But fate contrives that he should spend the night on a little island together with the girl whom he loves and who loves him. There is a scandal, and the girl's father insists on the minister also confessing before the whole church. He confesses, and then, feeling himself unworthy, abandons his office and takes refuge in the romantic and somewhat melodramatic

surroundings of an Italian convent. Here his beloved rejoins him, romantically suffering from consumption, and dies in his arms.

A follower of Freud could easily find in these works quite interesting erotic-mystical complexes, and could trace the history of repeated and quasi-atavistic frustrations. But they interest us mainly because they reveal the soul, the tastes, the torments both open and secret, the tenacious traditionalism and the incipient rebellion against tradition, of the English middle classes at the end of the last century. We see a stronghold of the oldest and stiffest Protestantism crumbling away *ab intus*; the old compromising and empirical optimism of English tradition, aided by culture and by political and economic success, penetrating the inner recesses of the fortress. What was once a battle between two separate, opposed camps, between Cavaliers and Roundheads, now turns into an internal spiritual discord. Here again, *Graecia capta*; the Puritans have triumphed, but now that they are victorious they have to rid their mentality, bit by bit, of nearly all its fundamental elements.

Jones makes the most of his artistic possibilities in what is usually defined as the "comedy of manners". This kind of comedy goes back to Ben Jonson and other Elizabethan wits; in common with the old comedies of manners, these new ones bring on to the stage characters, situations and events which are probable and contemporary. The spirit and technique, however, are entirely changed. In *The Liars* (1897), revised in 1914, the *milieu* is something between aristocratic and upper middle class, and the characters are baronets, colonels and heroes of African enterprises.

Lady Jessica, a gracious and well-known society lady, has a very pronounced flirtation with such a hero, who is wildly in love with her. They compromise themselves, and in order to prevent the husband knowing and to avoid scandal, her whole circle of friends become entangled in an ever thicker web of stories and lies, which reach their climax in the third act, which is a little prodigy of skill and dramatic invention. But it is in the fourth act, in my opinion, that Jones has almost reached the heights of genius. Here everything has to be put right; the author has taken care to let us know that nothing serious has happened, that Lady Jessica is only guilty of fickleness and a superficial infatuation; but the husband, Sir Gilbert, has every reason for suspicion, and the lover, Falkner, asks nothing better than a scandal, because then Lady Jessica would have to be divorced and could soon marry him. Sir Christopher, the colonel, a companion of Falkner's in African adventures, his friend and admirer, and a friend of all the others, is just about to leave again for Africa, and is in a terrible bustle with his packing. Over the whole of the act, which is dominated by this character, a sort of ideal John Bull, there breathes an atmosphere of hurry, of imminent departure, of alluring, dangerous adventures which are waiting in the distance; as though an ocean wind were blowing the little play to its close. Between one suitcase and the next, Sir Christopher persuades the lady of his fancy to marry and follow him, Lady Jessica to return to her brute of a husband, the latter to be less intractable, and lastly Falkner, crushed by the shattering of all his dreams, to return to Africa where worthy tasks await him.

Thus all goes well and everything is *couleur de rose*, almost too much so. If the affair happened in our day, instead of thirty or forty years ago, this *dénouement* would be impossible, because Lady Jessica would have no fear of divorce, especially if she had the chance of marrying a national hero like Falkner. But in the 'nineties society was more rigid and conventional. Besides, the author disapproves of all these goings-on, and fully agrees with the ideas of Sir Christopher. But the stroke of genius is this, that the real *Deus ex machina* of the comedy is the impending departure, the ocean, the African adventures. We see, I believe, for the first time on the stage the modern Englishman packing. The middle classes have discovered the psychological and moral meaning of the Empire. They have adopted and adapted to themselves that active, airy optimism of sailors and adventurers, which already breathed in the work of Shakespeare, and which was current in his time. The world is large, possibilities are infinite. Falkner has lost in love, but war and glory remain; and Sir Gilbert will have to take his inconstant wife to supper at the smartest restaurants in London. Thus constantly recur, in new forms and under new conditions, the eternal characteristics of the English soul: a spirit of compromise, a spirit of adventure, a thrusting, empirical optimism.

We will pass over the other works of Jones: *The Case of Rebellious Susan* and *The Masqueraders*, comedies; *The Hypocrites* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence*, dramas on social themes, and others. He died in 1928, but remains characteristic of the end of the nineteenth century; he was the first dramatist of the new middle classes, his art was sound, and

he was perfectly conscious of his new artistic and social function.

Pinero, later Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, is by remote ancestry a Portuguese Jew, but entirely English by education, and from the middle classes. He is the living symbol of a certain affinity between the Puritan and Jewish middle classes; an affinity which has led, in this last century, to a vast fusion of the two, and to a mutual exchange of criteria, customs and instincts; so much so that many of the less pleasing qualities of modern society, which English anti-Semites ascribe to the Jews, should with equal justice be ascribed to the Nonconformist middle classes. Pinero was an actor in his youth, but not a great actor; he thus knew all the secrets of the stage, and showed later that he knew how to make wide use of them. This perfect command of the stage is almost to be deplored; it has always been one of his powers but also one of his limitations; he is very rarely undramatic, but he also very rarely frees himself from the more certain and well-tried resources of stagecraft, or discards them in order to attain a superior stagecraft. In comedy his technique is never entirely free from the stamp of the French masters of the middle of the century, such as Sardou, Scribe and Augier; and in this respect he is even less personal and original than Jones, although more fertile and various in his ideas. His scheme is always the same: a comic plot rendered as plausible as possible, which thickens until it reaches an almost dramatic tension in the penultimate act, and then unravels itself agreeably in the last act, with a short and very happy ending. He presents little sketches from life with a certain realism often caricatured without excess; his art, to use the

language of modern painters, is anecdotal and illustrative, neither impressionist nor expressionist; and, being incapable of reproducing profound and fundamental situations, tends to brush them by without touching them.

This is the case with the first comedy, *Two Hundred a Year* (1877) and *The Gay Lord Quex*, *The Magistrate* (1885), and many others. He is a Sardou who has come to closer grips with life, who has morality, or moralizing, at heart and who has, sometimes, wider and more serious conclusions to suggest; with a vague background of melancholy, and an optimism which always has some reservation to make, but does not reveal it—characteristics which in Pinero can perhaps be ascribed to his race. Besides these comedies or farces which depict characteristic types and environments (other examples are *The Schoolmistress* and *In Chancery*) he has written comedies which he defines as *serious*, such as *His House in Order*, and I should like to add *Trelawny of the Wells*, which are considered as models of good construction, in which characteristic figures and surroundings are presented with the additional aim of explaining a problem and a conflict of a general character.

In the last-mentioned play, for example, the plot revolves round an old and very solemn magistrate, whose nephew and ward goes and falls in love with a charming actress. The contrast between the pompous, rigid and conventional household of the old man and the bohemian atmosphere in the lodgings of the old repertory company in which young Trelawny lives could not be more cleverly treated. This comedy is also somewhat autobiographical, as it presents the first and difficult steps of a young actor-author who is

experimenting with the *new* drama; and also the contrast between the theatrical world of the old melodramatic repertory company and that of the new drawing-room comedies in which the girls and young men might have belonged, and often did belong, to the best and most recognized society. If only for these pictures of environment, the play is of interest in the history of English drama.

As in nearly all Pinero's work, there remains a trace of melodrama in *Trelawny of the Wells*. We must not forget that in 1884 he produced an adaptation of Ohnet's *The Iron Master*, and in 1898 the libretto of a comic opera, *The Beauty Stone*, written in collaboration with J. W. Comyns Carr. Even here he was not revolutionary enough to be able to free himself entirely from a form which through generations and centuries had become fixed in the traditions of the English theatre, and in public taste. This conventional element takes on a new, fresh aspect when Pinero passes to the imaginative, or at least when he inserts an imaginative element in his comedy. We find this trait in *Sweet Lavender* (1888), which had a great popular success, *The Widow of Wasdale Head*, a little comedy in one act, and particularly in *The Enchanted Cottage* of 1922. To this blending of the comic and the imaginative, so purely English, Pinero brings that same vague, yet not bitter background of melancholy which we have noticed already in his comedies of manners and "problem" comedies. We also find it again in the dramas, which are not always the best part of this author's work, but are the best known, and which make him a more salient figure in the development of modern English drama. His first attempt at serious drama was *The Squire* (1881), followed by *The Profligate*,

written in 1887 and performed in 1889. The latter is the story of a man who, after having spent a good part of his life in satisfying the most disorderly impulses, is unexpectedly brought to realize the tragic effects of his misdeeds on the life of a woman; the theme is cleverly developed up to a final crisis of remorse, in front of which Pinero found himself perplexed. The drama had to end either in the high domain of tragedy, with the suicide of the protagonist, or else in the grim, opaque atmosphere of Ibsenian fatality, with the indication of a severe, immanent Nemesis. Neither solution was really suited to Pinero's talent, who wrote both of them, leaving the choice to the company; and for two or three years, as if disheartened, he stopped writing and retired to meditate on the master who was then being revealed to the new generations of the theatre—Ibsen.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) was the result of these meditations, and it had a great success, especially among the young. Let me briefly sketch the theme of this drama, which is very well known even outside England. Mr. Tanqueray, a widower, has a grown-up daughter at school; but being still vigorous, and troubled by the demon of Eros, he decides to marry Paula, whose past history is more than doubtful—a scarlet woman in fact. This character is treated cleverly and delicately. She is obviously the type of woman one would expect, but not wicked or selfish; she asks no better than to live peacefully with poor Tanqueray, his friend Drummle, very conventional and middle class, and the dear child Ellean, an intolerant little prude, who would have made an excellent character of satire, if the author had not considered her instead as an

ordinary type of well-bred middle-class girl. The relations between the second Mrs. Tanqueray and the whole of Mr. Tanqueray's environment are therefore of the falsest and worst, especially those between the stepmother and stepdaughter; and the latter is taken away to Paris by a friend of the family, for a voyage of instruction, as it was then termed. In the third act the bomb explodes: Ellean returns unexpectedly, followed by a *fiancé* whom she has found in Paris, but it is soon discovered that he was once Paula's lover. There follow, in the third and fourth acts, various scenes of increasing dramatic effect, until Paula, now despairing of reconciling her present with her past, and feeling herself a hardly tolerated stranger in her new family, irresistibly cast off by the world, kills herself.

Bernard Shaw, who was then a dramatic critic, and who fired arrows of various sizes at all the targets the old drama provided, observed that the masculine population of England being at least twenty-five million, there was about a twenty-five millionth of probability that Tanqueray's daughter should go and get engaged to an old lover of Mrs. Tanqueray. The drama was not, therefore, as Ibsen and all the new school required, born from the fatal development of the characters, but principally from an exceptional weaving of circumstances. In addition, Shaw denied the audacity which others saw in this work, through Pinero's having dared to meddle with affairs which the middle classes then preferred to leave undiscussed; on the contrary, observed the critic, this drama points to a single moral, which is that no social regeneration and rehabilitation should be possible for a woman with a past, and that in society it is always the Elleans who are right. According to Shaw, therefore,

the drama is false and immoral; and, having started out in this direction, he continued to puncture in the same way the successive Pinerian, or as he called them *Pinerotic* works: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), *Iris* (1901) and *Mid-Channel* (1909), perhaps the best of all.

Shaw was then a furious militant Ibsenite, a socialist, and a reformer in all fields and at all costs. In comparison with him, Pinero was certainly a soldier in the rear guard, who involuntarily betrayed his own army. To appreciate Pinero one must forget, not only Ibsen, but all that rebellion of the middle classes against themselves, of which Marx was one of the prophets, and of which Shaw was later, in England, the dramatist and bard in one. Pinero is a bourgeois who studies his own class and his own soul, without indignation and without rebellion. He studies them, and displays their errors, horrors, contrasts, and the ridiculous or tragic perplexities of their lives, because he has a human, sympathetic, observing spirit; because he has that happy talent for the stage, that art of seeing and constructing the *representable*, the "stageable", and wants to make the best use of it. As a member of the middle classes, as a Jew, as a well-educated Englishman, he lives and lets live: he wants to amuse, to interest, to touch the strings of art if he can, but confines himself to the limits of the real which he sees around him and has in him. The world is what it is; one must understand it with sympathy and adapt oneself to it. In his last works, published, but not performed, in 1930, Pinero still maintains this calm which is shot with a kind of atavistic melancholy: *Dr. Harmer's Holidays*, where a case of dual personality is studied, and two farces, *Child Man* and *A Seat in the Park*.

In the last, a respectable middle-aged gentleman enjoying a siesta in Hyde Park has a little flirtation with a charming girl who is sitting next to him, but at the end he learns that she is the new housemaid, engaged by his formidable better half! It is a piece of graceful and clever realism, without profound passion or anguish; in fact, without greatness.

Alfred Sutro tried to strike a deeper note, with debatable success. The reader will find a first standpoint for understanding this author when he learns that he was the English translator of Maeterlinck, for there is a spiritual affinity between the two; they have perhaps in common the tendency to compromise the real by projecting it on to a plane of imaginative sentimentalism. They hold in reserve an arbitrary world in which the sentiments are all pure and the hearts all perfect. This is not the place to judge Maeterlinck, but Sutro always remained bound to the realistic drama of manners and environment; his work has a satirical basis and he has an ill-concealed inclination to moralize. He does not openly have recourse to the fantastic as Barrie did later (with striking results, as we shall see); he wants to remain in the ambit of the seen and the probable, he wants the sermon to arise from the characters and the action. On these lines one can become an Ibsen or a Shaw; on quite another plane, but in the same direction, a Verga; but one can never become a Maeterlinck. Thus Sutro is another author typical of the complacent, triumphant middle classes, who have faith in an ideal and who find it in Tosti's songs. This generic ideal, a mixture of confused sentiment, the residues of Calvinism, and ambiguous imagination, is a moral alibi of which the

middle classes continued to make use in order to convince themselves of their proper rights in the hour of victory and fortune. In Sutro's first one-act comedy, *A Marriage has been Arranged*, which was a success in 1902, we find a poor, well-born girl who at a ball meets a very rich *parvenu*, who would make a good match for her. He proposes brutally, on stated terms and conditions, and she austerely declines. The man then discloses himself, and becomes more human; he tells her about the hardships of his life, his loneliness and sadness; he describes the type of woman he would like to marry, and asks the girl to find him such a wife among her friends. The girl then pretends to describe one of her friends, and receives a complete declaration of love in her name; and at the end the implicit game of both is revealed: the man, in describing his ideal woman, was describing the girl who was present, and the girl was receiving, in the name of the hypothetical third person, the regular and prescribed addresses of the man. The middle classes naturally applauded. The nobility, too expert and therefore a little cynical in human affairs, could use marriage as a business contract; the low-class *nouveau riche* could treat it as an outlet for instincts and ambitions. But not the middle classes: they wanted to find in marriage the myth of pure sentiment, of absolute devotion, of an ideal attained. The middle classes need ideals as the aristocracy need traditions; and as the traditions of the latter, when finally analysed, are always based on power, so are the ideals of the former always based on money. In Sutro's little comedy an outsider does manage to buy the beautiful woman and the traditions, or rather an entry into society, with his money; but not before the mythical flowering of

the sentimental ideal has been clearly shown between the two.

In *The Walls of Jericho* Sutro brings satire to bear directly on the nobility and so-called high society. Here also there is a very rich member of the middle classes who has married the daughter of an impoverished nobleman. It is a severe satire of society life, cleverly staged, morally a little ingenuous and coarse. It shows a rather silly and "arty" society, such as existed perhaps in London at the beginning of the century as a pallid residue of the "Naughty 'Nineties". The solid middle-class husband finally loses patience with his frivolous wife, and threatens to leave for Australia with the son. She then repents and submits, realizing that her husband, her son, the home, etc., are what really matter. Middle-class morality had thus scored over the cynicism and presumption of the upper classes; the gentlemen in the front rows of the stalls applauded heartily. One wonders how all this could have been possible without the immense wealth of the protagonist: even tickets to Australia cost money. And the frivolities and caprices of good society, which scandalized the middle classes at the beginning of this century, have now in different forms become their own. *Graecia capta*: the ancestral compromise of the English spirit is invincible, it is adopted by each class which in turn assumes social dominance.

Sutro is thus more interesting as a historical symptom than as an artist; he remains, however, a clever and agreeable playwright, who was able to perfect himself and to strike new notes in successive works, such as *The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt* (1906) and *The Choice* (1919).

Arnold Bennett, a man of the world and a very prolific and successful novelist, approaches Sutro's humour and taste as a playwright. In *Milestones* (1912), written in collaboration with Edward Knoblock, he follows the fortunes of a rich middle-class family through three generations, giving a very brilliant example of that dramatic form destined also to have a success in revues, which consists in presenting, almost in a series of tableaux, the differences of opinions and customs in various epochs. There is here, rather than satire, a complacent humour and a recognition of the unchangeable human background behind the continual instability of fashions and tastes; it is as if the author shook hands with the people of his time and of his class, congratulating them on the progress they have achieved since the meanness and prejudices of the Victorian age; and also congratulating them on having still remained what they were, a strong and sturdy class, rich in history. Bennett, who was very sensible of new tastes and feelings, also wrote in 1911 a comedy with a semi-fantastic background, presenting the case of a famous artist who feigns death in order to go and live in a suburb, obscure and free, with a woman of his choice. When it is discovered that, instead of the artist, a poor butler has been buried in Westminster Abbey with all public honours, the comedy takes a satirico-political turn, and ends in a series of false recognitions and other tricks of the old drama, here used with ironical impudence.

A few other writers belong more or less to the period and type of which we have so far spoken: Percival Wilde, with his little comedies of bland middle-class realism; Frederick Fenn, clever at popular adaptations, at pleasantly

moralistic comedies, who in the London scenes of *'Op-o'-me-Thumb* (in collaboration with R. Pryce) gave in 1904 a pleasing and very precocious example of popular, dialectal realism; H. H. Davies, who particularly in *The Mollusc* (1907) abandons the vein of ironical and photographic realism, and tries to deepen the psychological analysis by using more imaginative methods; and Benn W. Levy, who in *This Woman Business* has ventured a step further in the revision, half realistic and half humoristic, of sentimental problems. Finally, we must also mention the worthy Robert Marshall, who at the end of the last century produced one or two comedies inspired by official experiences in the outposts of the Empire, which were the forerunners of a type of realistic *professional* drama, which has greatly developed in our time.

Up till now we have only considered those of the middle classes who went to the theatre with a serious face, ready to reflect and use their brains. In the theatre they began to consider the other classes and themselves: it was the hour of their victory, of their incipient refinement, and they saw others and themselves with a different outlook than before, and with the beginnings of critical anxiety. But there were also, in the same period, those who wanted to go to the theatre to enjoy themselves, without problems and spiritual torment. The old melodrama and the conventional repertory of the beginning and middle of the century were no longer sufficient to satisfy this huge category of spectators: their taste had become more subtle, more aware, and the old theatrical conventions had ceased to grip them. Also the best literary brains were no longer

so tremendously serious, or so grossly comic, as in the Romantic period. English prosperity and compromise having been born again on new foundations, there had also matured their most characteristic flower, which is humour. A sense of humour is a refined sense of proportion, which assumes an active form; which comments on life, not always openly, accepting its contradictions but fully realizing them. It flourishes therefore in periods of tranquil civilization and of developed culture, and perhaps presupposes the Anglo-Saxon mentality, with those characteristics which I have tried to indicate. Perhaps this capacity for smiling at themselves and at life is one of the essential qualities of the English, one of the determining conditions of the fact that they represent, among the other peoples, an organic and well-defined civilization.

In the field of humour, too, the English novel of the nineteenth century foreran, if it did not directly inspire, the drama. Dickens and Thackeray developed in the public a humorous sensibility and delicacy; but here again, through various historical causes, but above all through the characteristic mentality of the middle classes, what for a long time had been commonly accepted in writers, had to wait for years and decades before being recognized, or even only tolerated, on the stage. The friends of Thackeray, as has been seen, ridiculed the humble and homely theatrical works of Robertson, calling them "cup and saucer comedies"; but Robertson had a friend, a young lawyer without a brief, who even before 1870 had practised with success writing burlesque scenes, and ballads for humorous papers, which he illustrated himself, and which had a great popularity when they were

published in one volume entitled *Bab Ballads*. This young lawyer, William Schwenk Gilbert, managed in the course of a few years to rival on the stage the noble traditions of *Punch*, creating a type of light, satirical-humorous comedy in verse, which found in Arthur Sullivan an appropriate musician and became the purest, gayest type of operetta which the stage in England, and perhaps throughout the world, has ever seen since the eighteenth-century *Beggar's Opera*. The perfection reached by Gilbert in *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1878), *Patience* (1884) and *The Mikado* (1885) has never been equalled by any of the many writers who up to our day have tried to produce the same kind of play. This form of operetta, half spoken and half sung, having been sentimental in England, became piquant, satirical and slightly dubious in France, and then, passing to Germany and Vienna, became both sentimental and dubious, and as a pure form of comic art has never been rehabilitated.

Gilbert's operettas were performed innumerable times at the little Savoy Theatre, and had their "fans". They created a great sensation in America, where they did not fail to exercise a beneficial influence on the psychology of the public and on the technique of the actors and authors. They were also performed on the Continent, but with less success, owing to the difficulty of translating their humour and the difference of environment. The author himself directed their production in London, and insisted that the scenery should be realistic and serious, and that the actors should abstain from all the jokes and stage tricks of the old repertory. The most absurd, paradoxical and ironical songs had to be sung with extreme reserve,

correctness and seriousness; the most fantastic situations had to develop with the simplicity of real, everyday things. This play of contrasts, the first few times, put out the less intelligent and prepared part of the audience; but on the whole it obtained a double effect, that of giving to these works a far superior comic power, and of accompanying the birth of middle-class dramatic realism with another, as it were, reversed realism, intensely ironical, which also had its effect on the new *serious* dramatists. In this way Gilbert represented another conquest of the relativistic tradition of English culture over the dogmatism and grim, narrow-minded seriousness of the new middle classes; he grasped the new theatre at its roots and persuaded it to smile even at itself. Even the Ibsenites, after Gilbert, were forced not to take themselves and their mission so violently seriously. In this sense Gilbert anticipated Shaw and prepared the way for him; he was a reformer with a wink in his eye, who enjoyed buffoonery that was hearty and impossible, but always choice and refined; and his favourite laughing-stocks, in those operettas of which it is useless to try and give a synopsis because it would only give a vague idea of their effect, are the enthusiastic intellectuals, the decadents and the aesthetes. The public were allowed to laugh at the expense of *messieurs les écrivains*; and the latter had to let it be understood, from that time onward, that they were always capable of poking a little fun at themselves.

Thus Gilbert, amusing an ever vaster public, brought with his best works a fresh and authentic humour on to the stage. He forced the new middle classes to come to the theatre to smile and laugh at themselves and at their

dearest and oldest commonplaces. Then came the "Naughty 'Nineties" with Oscar Wilde's fireworks. He first attempted drama, with the mediocre *Vera, or the Nihilists*, in 1883; with *The Duchess of Padua* (1891); and the doubtful and very decadent *Salome* (1892), which still to-day, in the English version (it was written first in French), can only be performed in England in private theatres. At Oxford, Wilde had been a pupil of Walter Pater, a hundred per cent Englishman and a very subtle humanist, who had prepared the way for a sort of new Renaissance (a little literary and decadent perhaps); starting from this point, and also afflicted by the influence of that Romanticism which had already produced Baudelaire and Rimbaud, which still flourished with Swinburne, and which was ripening the infatuation for Nietzsche, Wilde threw himself into the rich and gay society of the end of the century with his crusade of "Art for Art's sake" and other similar axioms, which he used to push his own particular idea of the beautiful (not always so very beautiful). This was his doctrine, which, as usual, had its roots in the practical and moral motives of the author. But besides all this, Wilde also had talent and wit. He had the talent of discovering the salient traits, especially the comic ones, of his characters; and a wit which hardly ever reaches the dispassionate tranquillity of humour, because it cannot, and does not want to, be ironical at its own expense, but which exploits with immense ability, and sometimes originality, the paradox, the play of words, and the grotesque outward appearance which can arise from a situation. Wilde is therefore a wit, but hardly ever a humorist. His humour is better shown in the short stories,

which are well known; on the stage, delight in the spoken paradox, and the display of piquant, acute thrust and parry in repartee, obtaining a sure effect, occupy all the author's wit and prevent him from penetrating to the deeper level of authentic humour. *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) is, and will remain, perhaps for ever, an evening's entertainment of unforgettable gaiety; one cannot even attempt to analyse the plot without killing all that is alive in the play. This is wit at its highest, incapable of dating. It can belong to any epoch, and in any epoch it will entertain, as long as there is a public the least disposed to laugh. Thus, even in virtue of what it is *not*, this comedy can be considered as a classic. In the other works there is always a moral, sentimental or social problem. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) there is a lady with a mixed past who sacrifices her feminine pride to save her daughter, without the latter's knowledge, from a fatal downfall. In *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895), sentimental motives predominate; but here also the dialogue is the comedy's great resource, and almost its reason for existing.

The fundamental defect of Wilde's comic and dramatic writing is always his want of human sympathy; he plays a game of illusion and artifice in which the individual character of the author is imposed on the public ; he is not a spirit who finds contacts with other spirits, expressing common and profound experiences. His is a controversial art, as art always is to some extent; but it is a controversial art whose real and ultimate end is only the practical, hedonistic affirmation of the man who has created it. In social conversation one sometimes, though

rarely, meets a man who tries to express some profound truth which exists in the thoughts of all, and who even in his witticism and irony tends to realize a harmony, a vital accord. More frequent, on the other hand, is the type of conversationalist who, on any intellectual level, which can vary from the greatest vulgarity to the highest refinement, holds a monologue during a dialogue, or rather uses the dialogue to give greater efficacy and surprise to his monologue, and is, in fact, a *virtuoso* who must show off his skill, and who looks for applause purely to satisfy his self-conceit. Wilde as a dramatist belongs to this second kind, which is an inferior one; but of this kind he is among the best. And, in this connection, one cannot say that his is an isolated case. Indeed, I should say that in the last fifty years or so the majority of European artists have adopted the attitude of party-chiefs, or almost of canvassers for themselves, and that in them the speculative and polemical activity has overcome the creative function; and this, as in the case of Wilde, is mainly a consequence of middle-class psychology, which, feeling the weakness of the basis of its superiority, which is wealth, seeks restlessly, by instinct, to constitute for itself religious, cultural and artistic alibis. For that reason it builds cathedrals and laboratories, for that reason also it aids and protects the arts. This is not done through a natural and spontaneous need, but by instinctive calculation. The proof is in the fact that modern European middle-class civilization either has no characteristic art of its own (as, for example, the principalities had their Renaissance) or else has an art which attacks, pricks and denies it. As always happens when there is no other link but money between him who serves and him who

rules, the servant either does no work or swindles his master.

Only in a more banal and modest sphere of dramatic art did the new middle classes find something to satisfy their needs without tormenting or betraying them; and some of these writers deserve a certain amount of praise for their cleverness and technical conscientiousness. But they have a more episodic than historical interest, and we must limit ourselves, here as in other parts of our survey, to a brief indication. C. Haddon Chambers produced some good *plays of ideas*; W. L. Courtney touched with some success all the strings, from farcical and tragical to imaginative; R. C. Carton succeeded as a very popular, and often amusing, playwright; Keble Howard insisted on a lighter, more facile tone than the others; Jerome K. Jerome, well known to the Italian public as a humorous story-teller, tried symbolical comedy in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1910), and in various other works he displayed his light, often fantastic, humour. Hall Caine, another very popular writer, but of a different sort, tried to revive the melodrama by modernizing it; and Conan Doyle once brought Sherlock Holmes on to the stage, but in his one-act play *Waterloo*, relying on the appeal to middle-class patriotism and loyalty, he obtained a special success which is undiminished to-day among provincial dramatic societies. The horrible and the terrifying were also exploited in middle-class drama, and L. N. Parker, a fertile stager of historical, mythical and imaginative themes, adapted with success for the stage some of the creepy short stories of Jacobs.

These were all more or less amusements; as, in another

field, are Campanile's novels, or those yellow-bound thrillers which to-day have such popularity in Italy. They were pastimes, sometimes clever enough. The middle classes went to the theatre to pass the evening, and therefore they got a form of drama which survives to-day and will always survive, as long as there are masses who have leisure time. But it is a drama which has very little historical importance, in the same sense and for the same reasons that it has very little artistic importance. Far more remarkable is that aggressive and militant drama, of which we must soon speak, and which has its origin in one of the noblest and most striking phenomena in the history of the modern British middle classes, or at least of their best part; I mean the sentiment of "social remorse".

III

THE REVOLT OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES

Ibsen and the renewal of the drama · Shaw as controversialist and humorist · Other innovators

SOME hold that there is an economic factor in all human affairs; and they are right. Others hold that the economic factor predominates in all human affairs; and they are wrong. The economic factor does not even predominate in those affairs which are usually specifically called economic. Rather, if by *factor* is meant the original impulse of our resolutions, it can no longer be defined as *economic*, unless one assigns to the latter word a signification which entirely disfigures it. In general the ancient peoples seem to have understood the convenience of not being too economic. Also the ancient classes, although they can be avaricious, are generally anti-economic. New ruling classes and castes are always greedy; they have an undiscriminating appetite, which seems insatiable. If their basis (to use another approximate but illuminating word) is force, they will be surpassed by those who are stronger; or else, if they succeeded in firmly establishing their power, after having appeased their first desires, they will gradually begin to devote themselves to their true function, and will become what we call an aristocracy. In a different phase of the cycle, when an aristocracy is old and worn out in fulfilling its own function, the social machine seems to work by

itself and men begin to forget the creative violence which occurred to make it go. The creation of a political society is not so very different from the creation of a picture or a novel: it demands invention, superior power and trickery. There is nothing morally valid in history which has not sprung from a violent and arbitrary gesture, or from a creative act of the spirit. By analogy, we can imagine the attitude of the Creator of ourselves and of all things to be one and the same.

But the great moral realities, once begun, continue by themselves. Man is capable of this miracle, that his work, even when not perpetuated in an object, survives him. Human action, above a certain level, is a capital which continues to pay interest even when he who took it has disappeared; subsequent heirs easily forget what kind of creative power was necessary to bring that capital into existence. They grow fat on the interest and try to explain *economically* the history of their fathers; they enjoy the advantages of a well-founded moral and judicial system, and are ashamed to remember the abuses and violence of their ancestors. Inverting cause and effect, they invent theories as to the natural goodness and sociability of men, but say that society has corrupted them; yet it is difficult to see how a society can corrupt, which is the effect of the natural sociability of naturally good men. Also, living under a régime in which private interests are safeguarded by public guarantees, and where wealth no longer obeys force, but is itself the greatest force, the new-comers develop the economic theory of history, and find economic reasons for the creative work of their ancestors. They administer the hereditary fortune with unprecedented skill; but a day

comes when they perceive that what they thought they were administering does not exist any longer: the hereditary fund is exhausted. Then all is darkness and silence; or else new creators come exultantly along, hasty, amoral and intractable, and begin the same business over again in quite new forms.

Middle classes resemble each other in the way that where they prevail everything is gold—a lustrous, unfruitful metal. Unconscious inheritors of power, and generally rather ungrateful inheritors, they convert this inheritance into money, into comforts for their own well-being; but, no longer having the power to defend their economic supremacy, they have to busy themselves in distributing the greatest possible well-being to the largest number of people. They have turned their supremacy into money; now they turn into money popular consent. They sign bills of exchange on an inheritance whose nature they ignore, because they have inherited it ready-made and have only brought to bear on it the psychology of inheritors, not that of creators. One day all these bills of exchange are presented at once and there comes a crash.

Hardly had the middle classes started going to the theatre than the problem of the drama also became an economic one. When people realized that the population of London ran, not to hundreds of thousands, but to millions, and that among these millions there were a moderate number who wanted to go to the theatre, and that therefore the theatre paid, the beginnings of a new decadence in these seemingly favourable circumstances became apparent. The old privileges of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, as has been mentioned, were suppressed

before the middle of the last century; legitimate dramas and comedies, as they were called, without singing and dancing in them, could now be performed anywhere. New theatres now sprang up, and their proprietors very soon acquired a sort of domination over stage life. Great actor-managers, like Irving, either disappeared or confined themselves to an old repertoire of established successes; they no longer contributed to the life of the drama, but rather involuntarily hindered each new development. The owner of the theatre, or somebody on his behalf, became an impresario. The intricate and expensive hierarchy of owners, directors, managers and producers began to be formed; there began to develop a network of business men, not at all artistic, who lived, and sometimes grew rich, by building, directing or managing theatres.

Another disastrous phenomenon was the long run. The middle classes, who are individualist in religion, politics and economics, are on the other hand gregarious in the matter of tastes, habits and inclinations. A play which has a success with a hundred spectators will have a success with a thousand; at any rate, the other nine hundred will go and see it, if only to have something to make conversation about with one of the first hundred. Thus a formidable chain of commonplaces and established criticisms is formed, which can keep the most mediocre production on the stage for two years running. When the business men of the theatre had understood this, they hastened to profit by it: it was no longer a question of a given theatre having a good, varied repertory, a tradition and level of its own, and therefore an affectionate, even if restricted, clientele; that would have been a legitimate industry, of the type

which accompanies any artistic manifestation. The new managers wanted instead the profits of speculation, for which the long run was necessary: the works performed, therefore, were more or less assured of popular success; the costs of production, even if heavy, were distributed over a long period; the actors, in view of lasting employment, were paid less.

The immensity of the metropolis, and the psychology of the endless success, made the speculators grow rich at the cost of the quality and variety of theatrical production. The actors, no longer united in stock or touring companies, no longer kept up to the mark by work in common or tested by frequent change of programme, now were engaged from time to time for a given theatre and for a definite production. Their contracts were by the month, by the week, even by the day. They had therefore little chance of learning, of attempting several different parts, or of improving; they ended by each acquiring a *cachet*, a limited type of acting of their own, which had a sure effect in a certain sort of part, which they always played. Indeed, the writers often arranged the characters and the action in view of certain actors who would be able to present them with the greatest popular success; a thing which has always occurred since the drama began, but as a rule only with great actors, who had to act and interpret first-class roles. Now the evil system extended to all leading members of the cast; and the play seemed to be turning towards a new forfn of masquerade, deprived of the popular sap and vigour it had in the past.

Thus, as soon as the middle classes began to move *en masse* towards the drama, and towards a drama which was

beginning to modernize its spirit and methods, instead of reviving it, they stopped its development by turning it into a new form of middle-class business. From a purely spiritual factor, as it had been even in the worst times, they made it an economic tool, an obscure instrument of business. Thus all that was good in the old repertories and the old conventions was lost, and a standard of modern, conventional mediocrity was substituted; conventional in the sense, not that new and productive dramatic conventions were created, but that the petty social conventions and mediocre tastes of the then ruling classes were imposed on the drama.

At this point, in the drama as in every other field, the younger sons of the middle classes rebelled. Middle classes always have younger sons who rise against them and betray them. This is the principal secret of their historical fertility, and one of the specific reasons for the short duration of their power. Through the sciences, the liberal professions, literature and art, these younger sons always end by acquiring a social and political superiority; they bring a different spirit into public life, they alter relations and proportions, and their predomination signifies the end of the purely middle-class period: sooner or later the economic system also feels the influence of this new social equilibrium. It was Henrik Ibsen who gave the substance and the precise tone to the revolt of the younger middle classes at the end of the nineteenth century. In Italy his work was only recognized by the intellectuals, and the general public only knew his work from a bad performance of *Ghosts* by the leading actors of thirty years ago. To understand Ibsen's significance one must see him against

his historical background, that of the Protestant middle classes in the north European countries at the end of the last century—a world with regard to which the Italy of the same and successive periods might belong to another planet, so great is the difference in historical and spiritual conditions.

Ibsen's artistic power, in its vital essence, is one with his moral indignation and his revolutionary function. He is a reversed Sibyl, who asks questions instead of giving answers. He asks the Protestant soul, which has placed itself free and alone before God, the reason for its social errors, its contradictions and its cruelties. A similar question would have no subverting or disturbing effect on a Latin mind, which is agnostic or catholic; a Latin would appeal to reality, tradition or action; he would be apathetic, or conservative, or revolutionary. In the Protestant the crisis is interior; the soul is forced to re-judge itself, alone with itself and nothing else. It may be that nothing externally visible happens, but the man sees landmarks vanishing in him which he believed to be solid and indisputable, and has to stir himself to find a new orientation. This is both the weakness and the power of Protestantism, that in it all the moral and social crises are simply religious crises, and that faith, willy-nilly, must follow social life day by day and fight its own battles there.

Ibsen pierced to the quick the Nordic middle-class conscience of the late nineteenth century; he re-examined their sexual, sentimental, family, civic, political, economic and intellectual conventions; he saw vast problems made concrete in particular cases, among characters very often artistically true, or rather, not photographically realistic

but endowed with that essential reality which is historical and super-historical at the same time. His characters are men and women of a given time and a given place, but also, in essence, of all times and of all places. The society which Ibsen thus called on to answer his grave questions could not take refuge in a purely argumentative reply, nor could it counter-attack by bringing up the peculiarities and individual defects of his characters; for behind Ibsen's attack there was Ibsen's art with its universality. It was said that Nora in *A Doll's House* and Hedda Gabler were isolated cases, that the deceased father in *Ghosts* was a degenerate libertine, and that no one had ever pretended that similar cases did not exist even in the best society. That is true; but it is also true that in Nora and in Hedda exist elements which are found, more or less latent, in all women; and the father in *Ghosts*, a character who does not appear but whose influence is felt throughout the action, was not necessarily a bad man, but a man of violent and exuberant impulses, who left behind him a long trail of ruin owing to the errors and baseness of the social mentality amid which he lived. It is difficult to escape by argument from Ibsen's questions, because only too often they touch the living spring of those fundamental characteristics from which humanity cannot free itself without almost denying its own nature. On the other hand, one can say that a large part of Ibsen's indignation and the "social remorse" to which he appeals tend to date; now that the social conditions and conventions against which he fought are changed, all his polemical fervour ceases to take an immediate hold on our minds, and for that reason it is usual to-day to perform his works with the

dresses and scenery of the time, so that even from these outward appearances the thoughts of the audience may be recalled to that society, so different from our own, which inspired the play.

The conscience of the Protestant middle classes could not escape from Ibsen's criticism: they were accused on the basis of their own dogmas and moral criteria, and they could not defend themselves except by shutting the doors of their theatres in Ibsen's face. In England, the censor prohibited the performance of Ibsen's works. But the younger middle classes rebelled, happy to have found such a fine banner for their campaign. In 1876 Sir Edmund Gosse published an article, which made history, calling the attention of cultured people in England to the new Norwegian dramatist; a few years later William Archer, a very notable dramatic critic and himself a playwright, put his personal friendship with Ibsen and his knowledge of his language to good use, and produced the first English translations of Ibsen's work, which circulated in print and deepened the interest in this new drama, mainly among the young. We have already seen how all the most characteristic middle-class writers of this period felt Ibsen's influence to some extent; it was a negative influence for the most part, inasmuch as he showed them what was dead in the old drama and ought not to be revived; it was not positive, because they lacked the indignation and the sense of "social remorse" which are the fundamental sources of Ibsen's inspiration. Jones and Pinero, to quote the two greatest, gave to the modern English middle classes a realistic and thoughtful drama, sometimes also gently satirical or controversial, but always keeping itself within

the main dictates of middle-class mentality and convention. They accustomed the middle classes to come to the theatre to think, sometimes they also accustomed them to contemplate themselves without the veil of preconceived commonplaces; but it was the Ibsenites who were to challenge them with an aggressive, hostile and fierce criticism, and almost force them, the middle classes, who had gained a complete mastery over modern life, to declare themselves morally defeated.

On the English stage the greatest protagonist of this curious battle, although not the only one, was George Bernard Shaw; and this struggle furnished the most constant incentive to all his work for over twenty years. It was a long, hard battle, which, in some respects, one may now call won, though won by the aid of many other causes. But the orthodox middle classes, as one may term them, did not let themselves be easily beaten by these rebellious younger sons: they held them off with dramatic censorship; they boycotted them on the stage, rendering it practically impossible to perform their works in all the large theatres; they also tried to destroy them with their criticism. Shaw managed to assert himself by using a terrible weapon of which he was master—laughter. But others had other things to say and wished to try other ways. The small *free* theatres rose up, to react against the customs and tastes of the commercialized theatres: that of Antoine was founded in Paris in 1887, that of Otto Brahm in Berlin in 1889, and that of J. T. Grein, a Dutchman, in London in 1891. This last produced works by Ibsen, Moore and Yeats, and (in 1894) Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, a play which, after *Widowers' Houses* (1892), already presented a clear example

of the polemical and dramatic tendencies of the then young author. In the course of time Grein's Independent Theatre, and the various similar ventures which succeeded it, made known other notable authors, some of them foreign; among these were Hauptmann, Sudermann, Tchekhov, Björnson and Strindberg. In 1899, continuing in a sense the programme of the Independent Theatre, there arose simultaneously the Stage Society in London and the Irish Literary Theatre (through the initiative of Yeats, Lady Gregory and Martyn) in Dublin; in 1904 Miss Horniman, a very rich Londoner with a passion for the theatre, came to the help of the Irish and financed the Abbey Theatre, which had so great an importance in the development of the Irish drama, and which was in its turn transformed into the National Irish Theatre of to-day. Miss Horniman again, in 1907, founded the Manchester Repertory Theatre, and about the same time the Theatre Guild was started in America. Permanent companies, a modern, unprejudiced and varied repertoire, and costs of production reduced to a minimum were the stock-in-trade of all the numerous small theatres which now rose up, developing in different ways the initiative of the *Indépendents*. Thus the rebellion found, or rather produced, the dramatic means of expression that it needed.

"I am Irish", said Shaw once; "my family come from Hampshire." A good number of Irish writers of Shaw's period, and not only writers, could say something similar on their own account. The English transplanted into Ireland, either through a happy fusion of the two very different races, or through having grown up in an environ-

ment so different to their own and perhaps richer in human experience, have often turned out to be exceptional, and the experiment which is now being made of an almost entirely free Ireland is partly due to them. Shaw is, then, by birth and by the family surroundings in which he first lived, an Anglo-Saxon Protestant with a Puritan vein, an authentic member of the nineteenth-century middle classes. He tells himself how his father, a proud teetotaller for religious reasons, was later a secret dipsomaniac. It is needless to add that the family traditions were Unionist and rather Orangist, and therefore looked on askance by the surrounding populace. It was like two worlds, opposed and hostile, the one small and familiar, the other vast and almost national, fitting into each other like Japanese boxes: the young Shaw had opportunity for exercising his precocious faculties of observation and criticism on both one and the other. The "little box" was superior to the big one; Shaw's family descended from the race of rulers, while the people around them belonged to a defeated and miserable race, passionate, versatile, incoherent, ready-witted and untrustworthy; the former were Puritan and middle class, and had, at any rate on principle, morality; the latter were Catholics and peasants, and had intelligence and religion. Shaw seems to have inherited, or developed, the soul and conscience of a Puritan together with the imaginative, versatile and two-sided brain of the Irishman.

Family circumstances, and the feeling of possessing qualities which the poor provincial surroundings would have stifled, soon sent him to London, which received him, as it receives everyone, with icy indifference. He lived for some time at his mother's expense, and he recounted this

later in order to give an example of his own *immorality*. He tried to work in the theatres as a musician, then as a musical critic; in England he was a precocious Wagnerian, as he showed later in a famous little book. Although not very good at languages, he was always the first to seize on any new idea which came from abroad, especially with regard to drama. He was one of the first English Socialists, but he was also one of the first to revise socialist theory, applying to it an Anglo-Saxon and Puritan mentality. He was a vegetarian, wore sandals, and had a long beard; he was a follower of Nature and a protector of animals; he derided the Pre-Raphaelites but did not wholly understand the Impressionists; he believed in Reason, but above all believed that *his* Reason was *the* Reason. Indignant and mocking, fond of sharp retorts and verbal wit, he saw mainly the polemical and reformative function of art, and was little impressed by perpetual values, but seemed rather to deny them. He found Shakespeare sentimental, and thought that he let himself be carried away by the passions he depicted. He wanted the artist to have a clear, impassive intellect, and to represent human reality with the aim of improving it. For him the true and the only works of art were really Nature and man: the sole aim of every spiritual activity should be the service of Nature and the improvement of man; and the masterpiece to be realized was to consist in a superior form of humanity. He believed, therefore, in the inward virtue of human nature and in the boundless possibilities of reason, which humanity is given to make use of; he believed in progress, in this rationalistic sense, and he saw the obstacle to progress in the muddles and conventionalism of sentiment in all its forms, including

the mystical and religious. For this reason he was a sworn enemy of sentiment and mysticism, and was only to realize later that his positivist, rationalist and back-to-nature attitude implied a sentiment and a mysticism which were here out of place because in contradiction to his premises: he had to pass, therefore, as will be seen, from the satirical and controversial attitude of his first works to a subsequent, more purely humorous, phase.

These characteristics which we have roughly described are more than enough to make us define the initial Shaw as a purely middle-class figure, but of the younger, clever and therefore rebellious kind. He is that type of *middle class anti-middle-class* to whom the greater part of the spiritual, and also political, life of Western civilization in the last century is due. Nearly all his basic characteristics are common to the modern Nordic middle classes; and we shall soon see that in him too there is an emotional residue, precisely of the romantic-mystical type which it is usual to expect in the middle classes, although to many it may seem paradoxical to find it in Shaw. His impassive, almost impersonal attitude, that feeling of being a little out of place anywhere and yet rather at home everywhere, his desire to react against every family or national tradition and to maintain his own spiritual line in a cold region of indifference, is also middle class. So is his tenacious and crude individualism, which is self-sufficient and almost preens itself on its own solitude; and so finally is his tendency to criticize authority in every positive historic form, and his failure to feel history as a living, integrant, spiritual reality. Among the younger middle classes, that is, among those who, belonging by temperament and origin to

this class, felt themselves disinherited and unjustly treated by it, these characteristics, accompanied often by a more lively intelligence and a wider experience of life, became sharper and led to the critical reconsideration of their own institutions and middle-class mentality. Shaw's case was the same; he was thrust in this direction by the double experience of his youth, and perhaps by the double basis of his nature; in fact by the habit, shown since his earliest work, of looking at the English from an Irish point of view, and *vice versa*.

Shaw is also the best of speakers and public orators. His short narrative works, written in youth and recently republished, only reveal him in flashes. In truth he does not seem capable of isolation and contemplation; his mind needs to move towards a practical objective, however vague and distant, and to hurl itself against an antagonist, even if indeterminate or fictitious. Behind this attitude there soon matures the consciousness of the *Limit*, of the infinite and various circumstances which weigh upon human affairs, confusing the primitive and elementary distinctions between good and evil, or right and wrong, and it arouses in their stead the sense of fate, the first condition required for the dramatic approach. Shaw is, then, in his initial stages, a polemical orator, an exceptional rhetorician, who possesses a dialectic sense of moral values which he will highly develop: the indignation which moves him stops suddenly before the adversary and surrenders its arms; Shaw's adversaries have rarely known how to explain their own case better than he did. When the adversary has spoken, the error, the wrong, the *evil* in fact, which Shaw wanted to denounce and combat, seems to be shared in

almost equal proportions between history, the whole of humanity, between you personally who read these lines and me. In a temperament like Ibsen's, such a sentiment of the common fault inspires tragedy; but Shaw is too English for that: he is essentially optimistic and compromising, always seeking a possible alternative; when there is really no other way out, he escapes the problem, like all his fellow-countrymen, and takes refuge in the arbitrary and the fantastic. A true Englishman never wants to contemplate an irreparability, not even that of death; and Shaw likes to bring back on to the stage characters who, in the play, have died, *e.g.* Joan of Arc. In fact his mind, in the very act of presenting the tragedy, rises above it, maintaining a distance and an impassiveness which then allow him to suggest a practical "moral to the fable", pointing a possible alternative. For this reason he always succeeds as a comic writer; perhaps he is the best and most characteristic comic author of our time.

For this reason also this surprising writer, with his rich, varied production, never surprises those who have understood the principal lines along which his mind moves. Those who read again in the recent edition his *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, some of which go back forty years, will find the future playwright already in embryo, clearly foreshadowed; but in these the controversial argument, directed against determinate persons and things, rarely rises to the level of true humour, and even the general considerations always appear to be determined by an immediate practical problem; they are clever rhetoric rather than serene criticism. This orator of the Fabian Society never belies himself, even to-day: when he has

written a successful comedy, he seems to repent of having somehow sacrificed to art his rhetorical argument; so he publishes the comedy with a long preface, always clever and pleasant, in which he admonishes us not to be deceived by what in the comedy seems to be, and really is, a Hegelian conflict of "right against right". For example, in *The Apple Cart* it seems that Shaw has succeeded in comically evoking the eternal arguments for monarchy, but no: the preface warns us that we have here only a satire on corrupted democracies and on the great speculations which compromise the public welfare in a democratic régime. Shaw the rhetorician and reformer seems to repent of Shaw the dramatist; his definition of a play being "something which interests the audience for two hours and a half", he tries to make us believe that the comic virtue of his works is only a stratagem to make us leave the theatre accepting his polemical thesis. What happens, on the contrary, is that we do not accept the polemical thesis and enjoy the great comic fertility of the play. We enjoy this comic sense because it makes an appeal above all to our intelligence; we are flattered by an author who can at last extract comedy from ideas, and not only from stage situations. In many cases also (and this is the greatest success of Shaw the controversialist) we are led to meditate on a problem which first appeared secondary, or did not interest us at all. But when it happens that such problems are changed with the course of time, the corresponding element of interest also ceases; then the debates of Shaw's characters lose interest, and it becomes necessary to perform his comedies, like Ibsen's dramas, in costumes of the time, that is, of the end of the

nineteenth century, in order to prevent certain situations appearing no longer comic, but discordant and ridiculous. This shows what a great deal is perishable in Shaw's work.

For example, *Widowers' Houses* (1892) is a long dramatized debate about the wretched houses in the London slums. Trench, the hero, jumps astride the Pegasus of pure ideals when he learns that his *fiancée's* dowry is derived from the excessive rents extorted from the poor inhabitants of these dismal hovels; he will not touch it! But unfortunately he learns, soon afterwards, that a large part of his own income is derived from the same source, and he ends by being dragged into the web and joining his father-in-law to extort still more money from the miserable tenants. The moral seems to be this: that it is useless and also unjust to accuse the landlords of the blot of the slums; the evil is deeper and vaster; the charge should be brought against the whole economic and moral system of middle-class society. But the merit of the comedy does not lie in this, but in having made alive for us the tragi-comical play of motives which fatally transforms the excellent Trench from the humanitarian Utopian he was into a sort of grinder of the faces of the poor. Similar in structure, and much better written, is *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898). Here, not only a stock subject of philanthropic reformers, but the whole of Nordic middle-class mentality with regard to the phenomenon of prostitution is taken by the horns. Shaw argues that it is either a social necessity, and then there is no reason for keeping poor Mrs. Warren and her former lodgers in a state of inferiority (this state of inferiority, on the contrary, in its turn causes the evil to grow worse); or else it is an evil that can be corrected, in

which case society should correct it by eliminating its causes, and not by reviling those who are the first and principal victims of such causes. This is a very good argument, but, as usual, one-sided, because it leaves out altogether the psychological and moral aspect of the problem, which is perhaps better and more generally understood in the Latin countries than among the puritan Anglo-Saxons. There remains the drama of Mrs. Warren, who after all is an excellent woman, in relation to her daughter, who is also a striking figure, a girl who has been made hard and inhuman through a badly conceived system of education.

Arms and the Man (1894) and *Candida* (1895) survive among the best works of Shaw, because in them the controversial motive is either very intimate and universal, or perfectly fused in the dramatic unfolding of the plot. The first is a satire on the romantic conception of war, in which it seems to be shown that wars are won more by intelligent commissariats than by noisy heroes. We have all had experience of the truth which is contained in this thesis, but also of the truth of another thesis, which to Shaw seems contrary but is really parallel: namely, that if it is difficult to win a war with commissariats which do not function, it is quite impossible to win with troops who have no military spirit, or will to sacrifice. In the traditions and melodramatic conventions surrounding war-heroism there is latent that essential and eternal element of war, which is psychological and moral. *Candida*, which is so well known in Italy, and which some consider to be Shaw's masterpiece, is the only comedy by this author in which the central problem is derived from a careful and direct

analysis of sentiments, especially those of love. It is said that Shaw wrote it after a stay in Florence, which detached him from his London environment of intellectual ladies in spectacles and *avant-garde* artists with sandals and long hair. In the sandy desert of Shavian intellectualism, *Candida* is an oasis; it is almost a plunge into the warm living blood of the human heart. There is paradox and satire even here; the philanthropic clergyman, an orator and a proselytizer, reveals himself to Candida's feminine intuition as the more feeble man, who has the greater need of the woman's affection. The finest character, studied with a sympathy and an intimacy which few suspected in Shaw, is that of Candida, who starts the illustrious cycle of Shavian women. Feminism was one of the problems which troubled English society at that time, and it formed part of the charge which the middle-class régime brought against itself and its own traditions and principles. Shaw brought his own method also into this field, by using the arguments of the anti-feminists to put the feminists in the right. "The woman is different from the man", asserted the former. "Certainly", retorted Shaw, "she is better and stronger; she knows by instinct the meaning and ultimate needs of life; in maternity, in love, in marriage, it is she who forms, dominates and rules man. It is she who seduces man see [*Man and Superman*, 1903], who makes him feel his vital force, the highest force of nature, and directs him to the supreme end of the species, which he neglects because he only feels it feebly, because he is a vain and conventional being, because he suffers more than woman the influence of prejudice and social convention." In the melodrama *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) it is the woman who

precipitates an equivocal situation and inverts the mutual positions of an evangelical clergyman and a kind of bandit. In the succeeding *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* the woman is directly the *Deus ex machina* who inspires and conducts the whole affair. Neither would it be difficult to show that the virtues of Bluntschli, the professional soldier in *Arms and the Man*, are typically feminine virtues; and that the feminine temperament predominates in nearly all the other comedies, until it finds an almost mystical apotheosis in *Saint Joan*.

Is Shaw, therefore, *un ami des femmes*? Quite the contrary. At most I should say that certain characteristics of feminine psychology prevail in his temperament, and that his intellect, here, too, auto-analytical and auto-critical, has set itself the task of dissecting these characteristics, of finding their real importance and place in society, cleansing them of commonplaces and presenting them in their bare and crude entirety. The romantic woman, the flirt, the woman who speculates on subtle erotic attractions, irritate him; he frankly prefers the prostitute to this type. Yet it must be added that for the most part Shavian criticism of the common conception of love misses the mark, and does not attain dramatic vivacity, because the whole spirit of the author seems lacking in erotic vigour. *Getting Married* (1908), a typical example of the *static* and discursive comedy, in one very long act which resembles, on a very different plane, a Wagner opera, is a long debate on marriage, but inconclusive, because that complex of sensuality and idealism which is the very basis of marriage is never conveyed or rendered dramatically vivid.

I will risk, without insisting on them too much, the

following conclusions on what has just been discussed: Shaw has a feminine temperament, a virile intelligence, and a neutral sensuality. This is a mixture which would appear rather monstrous in the meridional lands, but among the Nordic races it is most frequent, and perhaps tends to predominate in their modern civilization, as will be shown elsewhere in this volume.

Thus we have followed some of the tracks of Shavian controversy in its longest and most fertile phase. It might be added that the theme of religious criticism finds its most direct, and most dramatically successful, expression in a one-act play: *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909), which was for a long time banned from the stage. History, also, with its stock arguments, is faced and revised in a spirit not unlike that of *Arms and the Man*, in *The Man of Destiny* (1897), which is a Napoleonic satire, and in *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899). The problems of big business and of charity are debated at length in *Major Barbara* (1905); the *Doctor's Dilemma*, a faulty play, was written in 1906; *John Bull's Other Island*, an acute and very agreeable comment on the Irish problem, came in 1904. The Shakespearian problem is treated with an airy and paradoxical felicity in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910); and the legend of Pygmalion is wittily modernized, and used for the ends of social controversy and contemporary pedagogy, in *Pygmalion* (1913). In this modernizing of ancient themes, and in treating ancient characters with the familiarity and lack of prejudice that one uses with contemporaries, Shaw has influenced the whole of modern literary taste and culture, and he may be considered as one of the forerunners of "novelized" history.

G. K. Chesterton, in his monograph on Shaw, to which whoever writes of this dramatist will always remain under some obligation, recounts how Shaw went through a remarkable spiritual crisis after having read Plato's dialogues. He does not say when that happened, neither does he furnish any proof except a generic one, derived from his position as friend and sometimes confidant of the author (although the spiritual attitude of the two is almost antithetic, and they have often indulged in very keen controversy). Plato's dialogues, according to Chesterton, proved to Shaw the vanity, or at least the extreme relativity, of progress. Plato is a Shaw *ante litteram* of more than two millenniums ago; he cannot be accused of sentimentalism like Shakespeare; and his intellectual clearness and firmness touch the highest peaks of thought. Shaw finally understood that, however much one does, in a certain sense everything has been done already; that progress is not necessary, linear and collective, but, if anything, individual, cyclic and miraculous. After all, his study of the various problems treated in his first comedies, and his dramatic intuition, must have led him to similar conclusions; since drama always springs from the sentiment of fate, and Shaw also, in his argumentative and intellectual way, had always opposed a thesis to an antithesis, and displayed the contrary arguments in the perpetual conflict of right against right. But he had not lacked a nineteenth-century faith in the "intimate laws of life", which "Reason" must discover and serve; this faith now grew weaker, or at least complicated itself with so many difficulties that it was unable to excite the enthusiasm and indignation which inspired the first works. Now he was only to grow indignant

about the obvious errors of men, about their disastrous conventions, their ridiculous prejudices, and their hypocrisy and cruelty; if at first he set himself a social and political aim, historically determinable, now he limited himself more and more to moral satire; the controversial rhetorician became a satirical moralist. Nor would this attitude ever have been enough to cause dramatic inspiration, if history and legend had not been united to it to furnish a wide store of intellectual and imaginative material.

Shaw has not the sad, passionate imagination of the Irish, nor altogether the rosy, optimistic imagination of the Anglo-Saxons. The fanciful impulse serves him to arrange on the canvas of his mind the general outlines and principal masses of a picture. But suddenly his fertile imagination, his seemingly inexhaustible sense of observation, make living people swarm within the broad lines dictated by fancy; people whom we feel we have met some time or other at tea, in the office, at a ceremony or a dance. This crowd of real, individual beings then becomes in its turn the subtle, controversial instrument of the author's wit, which uses each created character to present a thesis, demolish a stock argument, or simply win the heart of the gallery with a noisy and effective joke. But the general atmosphere of the play, when it is of an imaginative, or an imaginative-historical, type, remains contemplative and melancholy, and one would say that the comic, or rather dramatic, elements were inserted almost arbitrarily. This is already noticeable in *The Philanderer* (1898), but more in *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), which belongs to the second group of Shavian works, and reveals an attitude of sympathy and tolerance towards every sincere form of

religiousness, of which there were few traces in the former comedies. The play is fantastic and almost symbolical, and the plot turns on the mutual solidarity of the poor Christian Androcles with his lion (the love of animals is a pure Anglo-Saxon motive; in Shaw it is also a residue of his philosophy of nature). Around these two there is a crowd of very vivid minor characters, each of which provides local colour and fulfils an imaginative, and at the same time a polemic and moralistic, function: the terrible Christian with fighting instincts, who finds in the circus his unrestrained vocation for war; the equivocal Christian, who bargains with God and the devil, and ends by being devoured after having abjured; the devout lady who obtains the hand of her admirer; the Roman officer, a type of rough, hearty English sergeant, who speaks Cockney; the vain Emperor, who walks along looking at himself in a little mirror, but does not forget the affairs of state, and after having seen the courage of the Christians enrols them in the army, and wants to be admired by the people with one foot on Androcles' lion; the cowardly and arrogant dandy, who wants to put the endurance of the Christians to the proof, and receives a severe lesson;—it is a dense, multi-coloured throng, in which each character bears a universal significance yet remains perfectly individual.

Sometimes it is said that Shaw's characters are gramophones, automatic loudspeakers intended to repeat his sermons to the public. The point is justified in many cases, especially in the comedies of the first period, in the *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) and in the *Plays for Puritans* (1900). Also in *Man and Superman* (1903), the

fantastic interlude,—where Don Juan, the Commander, and the devil appear in hell, and Don Juan explains how love obeys the *life force*, the vital force to which superior man, the philosopher, must submit, and that woman is the greatest discharger of such force, and that she, therefore, and not the man, is the real seducer,—this intermezzo is nothing but a clever paradox in dialogue (which contains, after all, a good dose of truth), and a pseudo-philosophical sermon, without any dramatic interest or relief through action. The principle that the "great seducer" is he who lets himself be most often and most thoroughly seduced is expressive of Shaw's feminine temperament; but this principle, in the fantastic interlude, is only preached, while it is a vital and dramatic element in the remainder of the comedy, which is realistic and contemporary. Here, Tanner is the intellectual, the theoretical superman, a common type in the first quarter of this century, and well known to Shaw, who in this character has also to some extent ironically sketched himself; and Ann is the universal, almost vulgar, type of the husband-hunting girl, who has set her eyes on a man and does not let go of him until she has been "seduced". Tanner the superman ends by falling in love against his will, and becomes engaged unwillingly to this common and selfish woman, who, however, possesses much more of the *life force*, the irresistible instinct of life and procreation, than he.

In the best instances, therefore, the controversial and discursive function of Shaw's characters does not prevent them from having dramatic life and artistic universality. Certainly the "static comedies", such as *Getting Married* or *Misalliance*, which was performed without success in

1910, are those where the characters, forced to speak too much and hardly act at all, are most lacking in individuality and universality. Here the author tries to obtain a dramatic contrast of ideas, and nothing else; which is impossible, because ideas, when they are such, stand *beyond* the drama, and if they are not genuine ideas, they are really passions, which would show themselves in the action, however expressed. A *drama of ideas* can be a drama which suggests ideas, as post-dramatic conclusions; but the drama in itself always lies entirely in the action, even if the latter, complicated with a thousand intellectual reflections and interruptions, develops only in words, and in words rich with thought. In fact, in the drama even the word must be action, and a thought can arise *from* the drama, but cannot be *in* the drama as such.

Shaw must have grasped this truth, or guessed it at the time when his youthful faith in progress underwent such a profound transformation: or at least, feeling it intellectually impossible to grow indignant against society as a whole, as he did before, and acquiring a wider and more intimate sense of the first and perennial springs of human action, he began to feel the lyrical sentiment of what may be called the sad immutabilities of life. A different temperament, in this phase of its development, would have produced works of lyrical inspiration. To achieve that, an *old* temperament is required, an heir of a completed civilization, which sums up the experiences of an expert and exhausted aristocracy: the first Romantics, the Grays and the Wordsworths, descendants of the mature eighteenth-century civilization, could be lyrical writers, but not this ironical and rhetorical son of a still virile and powerful bourgeoisie. Shaw is a

man who at the bottom of his heart finds the world pleasant; he is too Puritan to be lyrical and too middle class to be tragical. He cannot reach the melancholy of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, because in his soul he cannot pass beyond the formidable compromise of middle-class, Anglo-Saxon psychology; this compromise is at the root of his own artistic temperament, which goes from the polemical to the dramatic without allowing itself to be entirely engaged, and therefore realizes itself in the comic. Shaw's youthful polemical and humanitarian fervour having worn itself out, equally in the experiences of life and in those of wit, there remained a keen curiosity about men, a constitutional, empiric and compromising optimism, and the creative instinct, which in minds of this type is a second nature. Fantasy and history helped him here, two sources from which he had already drawn, but only in passing, and always in view of his arguments with his contemporaries. Now, without really becoming lyrical, Shaw turned to the contemplative; his satire lost its harshness and aggressiveness, and turned into wider and more benevolent laughter at humanity in general; it became, in its best manifestations, humorism.

From *Androcles and the Lion* (1913) we pass to *The Inca of Perusalem* (1917) and *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1918), in which the imaginative, the exotic and the melodramatic treated ironically play into each other's hand, and the contemporary satire is indirect and treated with a new sort of benevolence. In 1919 (not performed till 1921) appears *Heartbreak House*, the bitter fruit of the war, and perhaps the most melancholy of Shaw's works. Here he returns to modern middle-class surroundings, and to

satirical realism; but the satire has lost its enthusiastic, optimistic basis. These middle-class Utopians, who have seen the devastation of the ideals which held their life together, are too closely related to the author; their drama could too easily be his drama. Yet the play does not acquire tragically what, compared to the others, it loses comically; it leaves only a residue of bitterness, not transformed into art. *Back to Methuselah* (1921), composed of five parts which should be performed on successive evenings, recalls a Wagnerian idea, and is an attempt, as was said after the war, at "reconstruction". The first section begins in the Garden of Eden; in the second we are in our own time and well-known political figures appear on the scene; the third takes place in the year 2170, the fourth in 3000, the fifth in 31,920. It would be impossible and useless to give a summary of the whole work here; it is a vast paradox based on human incorrigibility (and relative corrigibility), mainly resting on those ideal motives and problems which were most acutely felt after the war. But on the whole it does not succeed in persuading us that the author himself is fully convinced. Shaw can never pass to the positive and suggest a practical line of action, without losing his balance and his persuasiveness. Perhaps he noticed it himself, when, after having given us this wide, imaginative, historical and controversial tapestry, he set himself to work on a fixed historical theme, concentrating more directly on penetrating the minds of the characters and drawing the drama from them: this was *Saint Joan* (1923). Those who acclaim this work as Shaw's masterpiece ignore his better plays of the old type, which are perhaps destined, not without reason, to remain longer on the stage. *Saint Joan* is

a play full of imaginative vigour and humorous, and sometimes polemical, subtlety; it is not at all a historical drama in the Romantic sense, nor is it realistically historical in the manner of a later Romanticism. It is a humorous and partly controversial fantasy, on a theme borrowed from history; and contains also a dramatic vein, not through the simple fact of the heroine's torture, but because Shaw puts to the torture one of his most profound moral motives: individualism. His Saint Joan is a martyr and a forerunner of that Protestant, middle-class anti-middle-class individualism, both mystical and rationalistic, which is one of the most constant themes in Shavian controversy. Individualism is for him the positive, human value; and history, in a certain sense, is the negative value, always impending: it is the limit, fate. This is the drama which Shaw really feels, with intimate sympathy, in *Saint Joan*: it is his personal drama, of *reason* against *history*. It is the drama of a people and a civilization who are not old enough to understand, but are old enough to feel, Vico's truth of the *verum ipsum factum*, the identity of history and consciousness, and the common root of the real and the ideal; it is the drama of the Nordics, the Protestants, the modern middle classes. For once Shaw lets himself be tragic; he portrays the tragedy of the bourgeoisie, and he expresses it as his own, intimate tragedy.

In *Getting Married*, which, as has been seen, is a very long dialogue without action on the theme of marriage, there is a female character of doubtful moral and social standing, who, at a certain point, receives an inspiration from on High, a message, as the Protestants say. This is like a rosy patch in the uniform grey of the comedy, a

pause which the author has allowed himself, and in which he has candidly expressed a little of his repressed mysticism; so in *Saint Joan*, and in many other works, that *feminine* temperament which we thought to trace in Shaw finds a little sentimental outlet, and then behind the playful, intellectual, Shavian irony, a curious sentimentalism peeps out, as of a Huguenot girl. If we join this observation to the fact that Shaw never has entirely the tragic courage of immorality or unmorality (although he likes to upset all the accepted conventions of middle-class morals), we see clearly all that is femininely candid and constitutionally *virginal* in the spirit of this artist. He has a *feminine* feeling about the problems of our society, and he sets a virile, controversial intelligence to demolish or reform all that does not agree with this feeling. His deep and continual preoccupation with all that is life, life force, nature, sensibility and sufferance, his very vegetarianism, make one think of the hyperaesthesia of a pregnant woman; even his fervid Irish imagination, when it touches the horrid or the evil, despair and death, suddenly goes astray, clings to fantasy and parodox, and re-establishes, by a stroke of wit, a rosy atmosphere of compromising optimism, full of possible alternatives, which, however disenchanted and ironical, is never cynical or despairing. The Anglo-Saxon, Puritan, middle-class man always prevails at the end; he reaffirms himself with his obstinate, antihistorical cheerfulness, after having laid bare all his own interior contradictions. He has no longer the fertile ferocity of his ancestors; he is more like a hen content to lead the little chicks for a walk over the intellectual farmyard, bristling at hawks and eaters of roast fowl. The

middle classes have revealed themselves through self-criticism: they are the feminine element in history. Femininity (a very different thing from feminism) was to be a more and more obvious characteristic of them in the twentieth century.

Thus Shaw helped to bring several old muddles to a head and helped to hasten on a new mentality, of which he was the forerunner, both in life and art; for, as we know, the two cannot be detached. He revealed the historical compromise of the English spirit even in the middle classes, who thought themselves immune from it; and so he forced all the cultivated part of the nation to break away from it, at least intellectually. But in place of this compromise between the will and the spirit, which had been, as was mentioned elsewhere, so fruitful, he left nothing but a feminine instinct to defend certain elementary interests and values, of the individual and the aggregate. Reason, in which he placed so much faith, did not serve him except to spread a new sense of mistrust in the will—in that miraculous and violent will, not rational but inspired, harmonious and virile, which we consider to be the creator of history.

It is needless to add that Shaw, even among dramatists, was not the only one to follow this path. He had spiritual brothers, who were, like him, largely a product of the age and of its interior torment. There was the great novelist George Moore, of an Anglo-Irish Catholic family, educated in England and France, who was among the founders of the Irish National Theatre, and began his artistic career as a rebel against all the traditions, religious,

national, artistic, and even moral. A follower of Zola at first, he developed a form of novel of his own, a sort of ironical realism treated in the purest literary forms, showing that he possessed that harmonious and poetic sense of the English language which is most often found in the Irish; and if such comparisons were not always dangerous, he might be called the Anatole France of the English novel. A friend of Shaw, Yeats, Martyn, Lady Gregory and all the other Anglo-Irish who had given themselves to the cause of the renewal of the drama at the end of the last century, he presented in 1893, at the Independent Theatre in London, a realistic comedy, *Strike at Arlingford*; but *The Making of an Immortal* and *The Passing of the Essenes* are more significant. In the first of these works it is assumed that Shakespeare's works were written by Bacon; Lord Bacon and Ben Jonson appear, and, in order to deflect the suspicions of the Queen as to the authorship of *Richard II*, decide to attribute it to a certain Master Shakespeare, an actor, who thus becomes "the bard of Avon". *The Passing of the Essenes* is taken from Moore's novel entitled *The Brook Kerith*, and the censor has never allowed it to be performed publicly. The Essenes are a sect of contemplative monks, among whom lives, tending the flocks, a Galilean who has taken refuge in their hermitage for many years: Jesus. An enlightened preacher whom the Jews are persecuting, Paul, arrives at the monastery in a state of exhaustion and spreads the Good News. The monks, for the most part, believe him and are excited by his faith; but two among them, arid intellectual types, a doctor and an Alexandrine philosopher, perceive that the legend which Paul recounts is the same as the

story of the shepherd Jesus' great adventure, of which they have had some information. Jesus, placed in the sepulchre, had apparently come to in the night, and had decided to disappear and repair to the distant mountains to live in contemplation of God, repenting of having created faith in his supernatural mission. The great scene of the drama is when Jesus and Paul find themselves face to face; Jesus does not want to deceive Paul, but neither does he want brutally to destroy his faith; he thinks that the miracle of Paul's faith is also required by God for His own ends. He therefore limits himself to briefly confessing the facts of the story, after which Paul's faith, put to a terrible test, conquers and affirms itself in spite of all. He departs followed by the converted monks, and the two unbelievers follow the others to contradict their good tidings wherever they preach it. Jesus remains to comfort the last days of the old patriarch, absorbed in compassion for men and in contemplation of God.

In this new version of the Sacred Legend, treated with a scenic mastery which shuns every facile or gross effect, with a delicacy which succeeds in giving value to the highest spiritual motives while discrediting the supernatural, and written in blank verse of a dignified and tranquil sonority, Moore gave one of the most characteristic examples of his genius, and expressed clearly what, if we are to believe David Hume, was the thought or the secret doubt of all the moderns belonging more or less to a positive religion. It is therefore a pure work of art, which we need not discuss here from the religious or moral point of view; but we must also mention it (since it is almost unknown) as a sign of the times, as almost a symbol of that tendency to a mysticism

of immanence, of which we have already seen traces in Shaw. The tendency is characteristic of the modern development of the Nordic middle classes, and also, as a tacit and sometimes unconscious prompting, underlies a large part of the other dramatic manifestations of which we must speak now and later.

As a contrast to Moore, almost an antidote, there is G. K. Chesterton, who in *Magic* (1913) also had recourse to an imaginative and symbolical theme, but with a contemporary background and with evident traces of satiric realism. It is difficult to summarize this bizarre comedy, full of innuendoes and biting allusions: its ultimate motive is that of all Chesterton's work, that is, the affirmation of the Catholic mentality as the unique possible alternative to an absolute religious and moral agnosticism. Thus, if Shaw is a critic of modern, Protestant, middle-class civilization, who in the inner but more or less transparent recesses of his consciousness wants to maintain and strengthen some of the spiritual postulates of that civilization, Moore and Chesterton are two critics, with contrary points of view, who really aim at a more radical revision of criteria and principles—one in the name of a humanistic agnosticism, the other in the name of Catholicism. Chesterton brings on to the stage the same imaginative and controversial wit which is found in his novels and short stories, but his dramatic output is small. I will mention only the great controversial and psychological subtlety of *The Judgement of Dr. Johnson*; a comedy which is perhaps more effective when read than when seen on the stage, because Chesterton's mind is more lyrical than dramatic: his logic is based on a speculative certainty, it moves

backwards from a firm and established goal; it does not contain a genuine clash of spiritual motives, and therefore not drama, because a sense of something which transcends the dramatic contrast hangs over it all.

The controversial, realistic, middle-class drama found other talents to enrich it, with intentions not far removed from those of Shaw, but generally with less lightness of taste and imagination. These writers turned more easily to the tragic, or else to the sad or "serious" drama, and they re-echoed contemporary French and German plays, as for example C. Haddon Chambers in his "dramas of ideas", and George Middleton. Younger and more prolific than these was an actor, Miles Malleson, who, though he did not entirely renounce melodramatic tricks and effects and sometimes abandoned himself to the fantastic and allegorical without entirely succeeding in investing them with dramatic vigour, has been one of the most characteristic playwrights of "social remorse". His play *Conflict* turns on a socialistic theme, and his little one-act comedy *A Man of Ideas* (1913) shows a thief caught red-handed in a country house, who gradually reveals himself to the owners of the house as a victim of society, worthy of compassion and in some respects almost of admiration. The dramatic element is in this progressive and well-constructed revelation of the common humanity beneath the surface of the rich proprietor and the chance offender; the provocative idea and the rhetorical appeal to "social remorse" spring from the action without any apparent effort.

Feminism found an upholder in Cicely Hamilton, a somewhat bitter controversialist, both in the novel and on

the stage. In the comedy *Just get Married* she launches a violent attack against the conventional, *masculine* conception of marriage, and in *Diana of Dobson's* she strikes a note of more effective realism with the tragi-comical story of a shop-girl. *The Child in Flanders*, by the same author, is a symbolical Nativity play inspired by the war, and is one of the many miracle plays which enjoyed popularity in England, especially in the first two decades of the century. They were an expression of that somewhat mannered mystical medievalism which was one of the characteristics of middle-class *conformity*. Cicely Hamilton reminds us of her namesake, Cosmo Hamilton, who in 1913 wrote a realistic, controversial comedy, *The Blindness of Virtue*, where the problem of the sexual education of the young was freely argued; he also produced some other plays of note.

Another good dramatist, and an attacker of the middle class was George Calderon, who died in 1915. In *The Fountain* he came to grips with organized philanthropy, showing how the money which is spent for the needy often comes from unjust profits and sometimes from grinding of the poor themselves; in *Revolt* he discussed the position of the artist in the struggle between capital and labour. Calderon also tried other forms of drama, not always with success, and generally his argument remains too crude, and not sufficiently fused in the drama. More subtle, although less effective on the stage, is Charles Rann Kennedy with his *Repertory of Plays for a Company of Seven Players* (published in 1930), which abound in moral ideas and social protests dramatically treated; in *The Necessary Evil*, a one-act play, he too treated the problem

of prostitution, certainly with less imaginative and dramatic power than Shaw, but perhaps with more human sympathy, and with a franker adherence to sentiment. Kennedy is almost a philosopher and a lyrical writer, with allegorical and mystical tendencies, who, in spite of his scanty popularity, deserves an honourable place among his contemporaries. Neither can we end this chapter without mentioning Israel Zangwill, a Jew and hence middle-class in his own way, but a Jew of the enthusiastic and rather fanatical type, a Zionist, a democrat and a violent pacifist. In his poetic, narrative and dramatic work he was messianic, striving for a moral and national awakening of the Jewish conscience, and was a bold denouncer of social wrongs. One might say that his whole mentality belongs to a recent, but now bygone, age, and all that remains of his art are a few effective and tragic pictures of Jewish surroundings, such as *The King of Schnorrers*, the pungent wit of a few comedies like *Merely Mary Ann*, and also a certain epic fervour in controversial works such as *The War God* (1911). Among the democratic Utopians of the beginning of our century he was one of the most fervid and best known, but his name as artist remains bound, above all, to the portrayal of obscure tragedies in the life of the ghetto, from which he was among the first writers in the West to draw genuine inspiration.

From all this aggressive literature aimed against the customs and the spirit of middle-class civilization, and from other parallel and concurrent causes, the cultured classes of contemporary England have derived a different mentality; Shaw's works of the first kind are, in some respects, now old-fashioned, because all that he satirizes

either exists no more, or exists only in face of open condemnation. Also the drama of "the younger sons of the middle classes", that drama which at first only found hospitality in the independent theatres or in the provincial repertory theatres, turned with success, after the first Shavian plays, to the conquest of the West End, and success slowly modified its spirit. These middle-class rebels posed as a new aristocracy democratic or directly Socialistic (or rather, Labour) in politics, but unprejudiced in the consideration of social facts. They were reformers and men of purpose in their own way; they had precise aims, both social and political, besides a dispassionate clearness in the understanding and formulation of social problems. It was part of their programme not to be scandalized or even surprised at anything; they inherited some of Shaw's naturist rationalism, but they reserved a corner of scepticism in their minds even with regard to that; in general their human sympathy was deeper and more intimate than that of Shaw and of other writers already mentioned, and they had not his taste for controversy and his desire to affirm their personalities in battle. They were more serious; in a very wide sense of the word, I should say that they were more *moral*.

Descendants of yesterday's rebels, these new and scattered middle-class aristocracies live almost exiled in a world which they ought to be guiding and ruling; they cannot openly command, having denied the superior, supra-rational necessity of command (and no one in reality *follows* another man, when that other man has declared himself his equal); and having accepted economics as a cause, rather than an effect, of historic events, their con-

tinual state of irritation against the economic slavery of our time remains vain and fruitless, even in the field of art. Theirs is, in fact, an aristocracy that cannot exercise its function as it ought, without falling into contradiction and caprice. Therefore it already reveals unhealthy, degenerate tendencies; it is discontented, snobbish and touchy; its *rationalism* forces it towards sexual indifference and perversion; its very refined taste tends to turn on itself and becomes futile and vacuous. It is the vast category of those who wear themselves out with "inward problems" and "social remorse", which have no effect or resonance outside the closed circle of initiates. Outside these closed circles, where sometimes even the air one breathes seems unreal, the masses drift on, without in the least understanding the tragic questions of Ibsen, the melancholy of Tchekhov, the satire of Shaw, the despair of Pirandello, the curses of a Piscator or of anyone else. The dust of democracies has buried Beauty and Truth like great statues, which a different civilization may perhaps disinter in centuries to come. . . .

IV

ARISTOCRATIC REALISM

Hankin, Granville Barker, Elizabeth Baker · Galsworthy, Chapin · The repertory theatres and provincial realism · Ervine and the later realists

ST. JOHN E. C. HANKIN never had a grateful or affectionate public in England, and he has certain characteristics which liken him to a contemporary German or Italian dramatist. His principal fault in the eyes of the British consists in the fact that he regards men without optimism, and does not enter into any compromise, either imaginative, sentimental or mystical; the empiric search of the Anglo-Saxons for possible alternatives seems to be strange and repugnant to him. For this reason his works never had a great success with the public; they were seldom performed when he was alive, and have hardly appeared on the stage at all since he died, barely forty years old, in 1909.

It must be recognized that Hankin is bitter of feeling and dry, sometimes forced and ineffective, in stage technique. Like Shaw, he has also been blamed for making his characters marionettes and loudspeakers, that is, false beings who have to expound or represent certain ideas of the author, without relation to the artistic reasons of the play. In the case of Shaw we saw how this criticism was sometimes just, sometimes quite unfounded; one can say as much for Hankin, although perhaps none of his

characters reach such heights of art as Shaw's best creations. But this is because Hankin lacked creative vigour, and not, as his critics asserted, because such characters "seem more invented than felt". Shaw's most vivid characters (apart from some fantastic figures with purely discursive functions) are the most *invented*, such as Bluntschli, Candida, Androcles or Joan of Arc. Realism and verisimilitude are two very different things; in general the realists have meant to be lifelike, but in fact, when they have attained artistic quality, they have produced an art which we call *realist* to define it historically, but which is no more and no less real or lifelike than all art, of whatever time or country. Hankin is therefore a realist in the sense in which Shaw is also a realist, that is, the *moral* impulse which spurs on his artistic creation takes contemporary social reality as its object, and aims at making modern man conscious of himself. But Shaw is an interested optimist, and Hankin is a disinterested pessimist; Shaw always hopes for the best and fully intends to make himself heard and to be successful: while Hankin contemplates the irremediable weaknesses of human nature and seems only to desire that men should see and recognize them, trusting perhaps in the beneficial effects, not social or historical, but individual and moral, of contrition and charity. This is a *Catholic* attitude, of which perhaps the author was not conscious, and which I believe he would not have accepted intellectually. In each of his works there is a character or a situation which all but attains the tragic, yet has not the strength of passion to reach it; and it is not through virtue, but through weakness, that these men and women fall back into the atmosphere of comedy.

Thus it is a comedy without joy and without hope, a bitter laugh on the theme of *homo sum et nihil humani* . . . or "O what fools these mortals be".

The Two Mr. Wetherbys (1903) presents two brothers, one separated from his wife who pursues him trying to patch up the broken union, and the other who tries at all costs to persuade his wife to stay with him, although they have nothing in common, not one affection or interest, and the woman tries to free herself from the useless yoke. It is an amusing comedy, full of clever lines and situations, but even from this brief mention it will be seen that cold reflection and despairing views of love and marriage are at the bottom of the cup.

Better than this play, in which the thesis is not wholly absorbed in the action, and richer in tragi-comical effects, is *The Return of the Prodigal* (1905). The prodigal son who returns from Australia is an airy youth, willing but inconclusive, doomed to eternal failure. In his absence the father and the brother, two types of Philistines greedy for gains and honours, have made their fortune in industry, and the brother is engaged to the most aristocratic and charming girl of the neighbourhood. All biblical hypocrisy is soon unmasked; the return of the prodigal son is a disaster for everyone: for the father, who has to guarantee him a living; for the brother, who is afraid of losing his aristocratic *fiancée*, and she naturally has eyes for no one but this reckless, romantic young man; and also for the sister, a resigned *souffre-douleurs* of the whole house, because only now does she see and understand her unavoidable destiny as a perpetual victim in this selfish family. But the most amusing figure, and the most bitter, is that of

the young prodigal, who has not repented at all, because, seeing that his misfortunes are consequences of his nature, he does not know what to repent of; and after he has succeeded in gauging exactly the selfishness of his father and his brother, he casts his nets and plays his catch with a logical and persuasive shamelessness.

The Cassilis Engagement (1907) shows the breaking-off of a threatened *mésalliance*, here also due to the play of selfish motives which in different ways distinguish all the characters in the comedy; and in *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908) there are two sisters, Hester and Janet, of whom the former leads a miserable life of sacrifice, a victim to family conventions and meanness, while Janet has freed herself from all ties, defied society and had an illegitimate son. A controversialist like Shaw would have made Janet a frank and discursive heroine, an exemplary *moralistic* character; Hankin, though with a far more delicate touch than in the preceding comedies, makes her simply an egoist who has had the courage of her own egoism, while Hester is only the victim of her own weakness. Even in the minor, gayer works of this author, such as *The Charity that Began at Home* and the very amusing one-act comedy *The Constant Lover*, one is always aware of a residue of that bitter clarity which the English call cynicism, and in the end it becomes monotonous. Hankin's drama always lies in encountering the hidden bestiality in man, and in accepting it with a smile which is really sadder and more serious than tears.

Harley Granville Barker starts from a similar attitude of direct and disinterested contemplation, but he compasses a wider and subtler scale of artistic truth. He takes also into

account the *good will* of men; and he appears more acutely tragic, because the humanity portrayed by Hankin gets, after all, always what it deserves, while Barker creates obscure heroes who try by immense sacrifices to move towards better things, and Society (which in middle-class realism is generally equivalent to Fate in Greek tragedy) dominates, limits and crushes them. The former are justly treated, because their selfishness is itself the wall they run their heads against, and which prevents them from rising to higher things; the latter, on the other hand, are led by circumstances of social life to an undeserved martyrdom.

Thus, more than a century late, Jean Jacques Rousseau arrives in England, not in the libraries, but in the souls of men and in the real passions of life. In England his spirit acquires dramatic power together with new revolutionary vigour through the swift awakening of consciences more sensitive to the tragedy of the new social circumstances due to industrialism, to urbanism and to all the complex conditions which the middle-class age brought into being —a tragedy aggravated by the ancient burden of conservatism, tradition and caste that lies on British shoulders, and by the strait-laced dogmas, still surviving, of middle-class Puritanism. Barker is thus in the domain of controversial, anti-middle-class realism; however, while Hankin knew how to rise above the level of mere argument in his lucidly pessimistic and ironical art, Barker rises above it by means of genuine sympathy with the inward motives of his characters; the *problem* is in his heart more than in his brain, and his heart is one with that of his heroes: he *pities* the drama he creates, and this compassion allows him to maintain a serenity of mind, and always to judge without

ever altogether condemning. We find here, instead of Hankin's bitterness, a fine and superior melancholy: the dramatic mode of inspiration seems almost left behind, and we are on the threshold of the lyrical.

Granville Barker was born and has lived in the theatre, and for the theatre; as stage manager and theatrical director he has brought new life and new ideas to stage technique. He retired a few years ago, and now confines himself to giving lectures and publishing books on theatrical problems and on the need for a "National English Theatre", to keep alive the classic repertory and to encourage intelligently every new force and initiative. And certainly, if this great project should ever be realized, no one would direct such a theatre better than Barker. Here, by necessity, we can only discuss the recent history of English drama, rather than the theatre in itself; it is therefore sufficient to have indicated the predominant position which this author holds, or could hold, in the English stage world, and we will pass on to his works. The first, *The Weather Hen* (1899), is among the less important. *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1901), on the other hand, is worth notice: it is one of the first effective incursions of the English realistic drama into the field of sexual problems. Ann Leete and her brother George both rebel against the social convention which imposes the observance of certain rules in the arrangement of marriages; the "life force", of which Shaw was talking so much in those days, induces them, to the sorrow of their parents and relations, to marry, the one a country lass and the other the family gardener—some advance since the times of the worthy Robertson, who wept over *mésalliances*! But here the argument is treated

with a lightness of touch which sometimes almost borders on the fantastic, and, as we have remarked that Barker hovers on the verge of the lyrical, it is not surprising to find him settling situations of the purely realistic "problem" type by taking a mystical-symbolical short-cut, which anticipates Barrie and is no longer purely *dramatic*. Ann Leete decides on her strange marriage almost through a revelation, when the gardener brings the news that her rustic sister-in-law has had a baby son. The fantastical-lyrical vein, in which this author (if the proper allowances are made) resembles Shakespeare in his later style, finds full expression in *Prunella* (1904, in collaboration with L. Housman), *The Harlequinade* (1913, in collaboration with D. C. Calthrop) and in other similar variations or theatrical digressions.

Let us examine *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905). The theme, if one can call it such, is that of the excessive liberty solicitors enjoy in administering the property of others. Old Voysey, a fantastic, disorderly and clever man, has dissipated the riches of many of his clients without anyone noticing, except his son Edward, who is to inherit the business. The old man dies suddenly, and the shameful state of bankruptcy is about to come to light. Edward is a scrupulous, strict and intelligent man: his first temptation is to call in the police and place himself in their hands, even if he should be called upon to suffer for his father's misdeeds and be condemned to prison. His sister Beatrice, a rebel made hard and inhuman by her own rebellion, considers him weak and cowardly because he cannot persuade himself to take this course. But her cousin Alice, Edward's *fiancée*, is braver and nearer the truth in advising

Edward to take up his cross and bear it: he must come to terms with the most impatient creditors, and perhaps sacrifice his whole life to the task of repairing his father's misdeeds. This is neither sheer, hard justice nor the clever compromise, rich in possibilities, of "all for the best": it is the acceptance of social and moral reality as we find it, with a noble and patient resignation to the immutability of evil.

Even from such a brief summary, it can be seen how much of the old and new Anglo-Saxon and middle-class mentality is superseded in this play, and how full of significance it is. The compromising optimism of "possible alternatives" is transformed into a sort of despairing, but heroic, fatalism. Beatrice, the rebel against society, a figure idolized by the other controversial realists, here looks more like the real thing, a being who, having done violence to the real order of things, has become in her turn almost brutalized; and two middle-class generations confront each other, that of the energetic, uncultured, resourceful and dishonest old man, and that of the refined, educated and sensitive young man, who has, however, no strength but to accept the load of his destiny. In *The Madras House* (1901) Barker presents a similar situation, pointing to similar conclusions, but on a wider plane and with a greater variety of problems and types. On the other hand, *Waste* (1907) is totally and clearly a tragedy. Henry Trebell, a young politician with a great future, is fascinated by the beauty of Amy O'Connell, whom he marries and from whom he expects a son; but the woman, frigid and incapable of desiring maternity, subjects herself to an illegal operation. The operation turns out fatal to the

mother and the unborn child, and very soon Trebell perceives that this scandal, of which he is quite guiltless, banishes him from political life. Thus at one stroke he loses his hoped-for career, the woman he loved intensely, and the expected heir, and he ends by committing suicide. It is a so-called "domestic" tragedy, which does not touch social problems so much as eternal moral ones, and it reaches the mark with greatness of effect subtly obtained; it is a precious and rare example of complete *tragedy* in modern English drama.

What is admirable in all Barker's work, both as author and producer, is his constant and often successful effort to lead the public to feel the element of drama in situations and characters which are in direct antithesis to the old melodramatic fashions and tastes. In a sense, he is the forerunner of the modern "intimists", and prepares the way for those developments of dramatic art which to-day, in face of the threatening rivalry of the cinema, tend to reconstitute for the theatre a function and a reason for existing. The cinema has adopted and expanded all the methods and resources of the old melodramatic and romantic drama of effects; from the modern theatre it has taken the idea of the proscenium arch, within which an animated picture develops, and it has given more variety and richer animation to the picture. But all this, except with a symbolist actor like Charlie Chaplin, who has created a great modern mask, does not appeal to the intellect, however great and successful the efforts of the talking film may be: and so Shaw produces his static and discursive comedies. Also, the cinema does not sound the depth of the most complex and delicate emotions or moral

situations; and then men like Barker succeed in evoking a new atmosphere of understanding and sympathy between the actors and the public. Like all the most ancient forms of art, the drama outlives new forms and tries to fulfil that function of its own which has an eternal and absolute value.

We have now come nearer to that type of drama which gives pre-eminence to the forces and values of environment and social atmosphere, and which attains its perfection, and also the beginning of its decadence, in Galsworthy's symbolism. The individual disappears in the mass; his happiness seems now to consist only in the lack of individuality; his life is not his own; to be victorious in society he must renounce all those spiritual values which an autonomy implies. It is strange, and typical of England, where the woman often possesses, in a striking way, those virtues which Italians consider rather as masculine, that this drama of the individual nullified by his environment should have been artistically felt by some women writers. In this connection Elizabeth Baker should be accorded the first place for her play *Chains* (1909), where the tragedy of daily life in the dreary suburbs of the huge modern city finds its purest and most direct expression. Charley Wilson, a clerk, lives in such a suburb with his wife Lily, a young woman of no personality and imagination. They have a lodger, Tennant, who is about to leave for Australia, and suddenly visions of liberty and great adventure spring up in Wilson's heart: it is the need for "self-expression", which the English, often unimaginative and inexpressive of character, are feeling acutely to-day, while in Italian there is not even a word to define it. Wilson, after long

debate and uncertainty, decides to go with Tennant, but in the last act, in the quietest and most banal manner, it is revealed that Lily is pregnant; thus Wilson sees his dream of liberty shattered at one blow; the chain of obscure and monotonous destiny now binds him once and for all.

After other works of minor interest, Miss Baker in 1913 wrote *The Price of Thomas Scott*, in which the tragedy takes on a more markedly human aspect in the figure of the protagonist, a Puritan middle-class provincial who rebels fanatically at the idea of ceding his property to an enterprise for popular amusements, and ends by restoring with contempt the money which he considers tainted. Here, facing the tyranny of the environment and of the social and economic machine, we see an absurd and almost repulsive personality, although drawn from life, who rebels in vain but almost heroically against circumstances; for this reason the play belongs to a category of which we have already seen other examples. *Chains*, on the other hand, remains a solitary little masterpiece, through the intensity of pathos which it succeeds in drawing from characters so common, empty and colourless.

Miss K. Githa Sowerby, with *Rutherford and Son* (1912), succeeded in creating almost a synthetic personality out of all the middle-class characters against which this sort of drama is directed, in Rutherford, the manufacturer, for whom nothing has any value that is not connected with the prosperity of his factory. Thus, while his machines multiply and prosper, and seem to devour every other life, human life languishes in the dreary, misty northern scene. One by one Rutherford's sons and daughters go

away from him, to seek liberty and life elsewhere; for a breath of real humanity they face misery and death. Only at the end of the play the daughter-in-law, abandoned by her husband, returns to ask the old man's protection, and brings him her son, who in the future will be able to inherit the business. This hope, and the sense of a tragic solitude, finally move the heart of Rutherford, who for this reason receives the two outcasts.

If at first, therefore, there were fierce attacks on the principles and conditions of middle-class society, now its fatal rationality begins to be felt. The problem, if there is one, is not in machines and economic systems, but in the hearts and intelligence of men. The middle classes, in that fervour of self-criticism which moves all their best sons, hopes to surpass itself in a sort of new Christianity, which would accept and appropriate all the arguments of criticism and modern science, and would move men towards an enlightened sense of charity. Society is an immense machine which mortifies individuals; individuals have to make a stand, not by rebellion, which now appears useless, but by educating themselves to a superior form of understanding and love. The hostile forces of society and tradition assume, in fact, a symbolical individuality; Evil lies not only in the servile circumstances of the present, but also in things which once appeared to be virtues—economic power, military glory and aristocratic prestige. Here we approach the lyrical atmosphere of conscious decadence; Society is spoken of as a Latin of the late Roman Empire might have spoken of the Barbarians. It is of just such a spiritual attitude that John Galsworthy is the most typical exponent.

Galsworthy was a quiet, clear-minded, middle-class man with a sensitive and sympathetic heart, who began his career as a lawyer and then as a novelist. It was not till 1906 that he wrote his first play, *The Silver Box*, in which there appear already some of the principal characteristics of all his dramatic work. A case is portrayed in which the justice of men does not correspond with what our moral sense clearly dictates. John, the poor devil who is condemned and severely branded by the words of the judge, is no less guilty than Jack, the rich young gentleman, who looks on unpunished at the trial. Society wanted a victim for its justice, and chose the poor, insignificant, weakest figure. In *Justice* (1901) the problem is represented in an even simpler and purer way: Falder, a passionate, sensitive young man, commits a theft in order to help the woman he loves. He is punished severely according to the law; in prison he is treated with the severity which was then used with all prisoners. In a very effective silent scene, which seems to anticipate the modern expressionists, we see the effects of a long period of solitary confinement on the unfortunate man. The penalty paid, he comes out of prison melancholy, enfeebled, terrorized and rejected, and puts an end to his adventure with suicide. The tragic greatness of this play springs from its simplicity, from the fact that there are no wicked or brutal characters in it, and that everything develops according to the law and custom; it springs also from the fact that the figure of Falder is mediocre, inspiring neither admiration nor passion; he is a man like so many others, such as we all might be. The play was so effective on the stage that it contributed notably towards promoting a reform of the

English prison system. This was its only directly controversial content, just as *The Silver Box* contained a satire on the unjust social prejudices. Yet the greatest artistic merit of the two plays is not in the satire or in the argument, and similarly their moral teaching is of a higher and more delicate nature. The plays are constructed so that they attain a strictly practical effectiveness, and this is generally one of Galsworthy's technical defects; when he has a thesis, he presents it in a dry, exclusive manner, at the expense of imagination, and indeed of art. But in each of his plays there is something else beyond the thesis, and in this something else lies the best of Galsworthy, his distinctive sign, and also the characteristics which make me call him the first decadent of English dramatic realism.

Let us observe some of his other works. *The Eldest Son* (1912) returns by a different path to the theme of morality applied differently to the rich and to the poor. *The Pigeon* (1912) raises the problem of tramps and down-and-outs. *The Fugitive* (1913) treats of the woman's position in our social life. *The Skin Game* (1920) and *Loyalties* (1922) present contrasts between classes, castes and categories: we see old nobility supplanted by profiteers, and Jews who are victims of suspicion and racial hatred. These are favourite motives of Galsworthy's, and also of his very large English public, to whom these social categories and divisions still seem alive and active and weighty, and therefore the problems connected with them, to which Galsworthy returns with an insistence which ends by being a weakness of invention, seem real also. But this public is certainly not the best informed about the real tendencies of our time, nor the most acute judge of the

artistic merits of such works. In plays such as *The Skin Game*, indeed, there are a number of small effects not far removed, in taste, from melodrama or from the first middle-class realists, such as Robertson, and they end by becoming monotonous; there is a play of sentimental motives which rarely leaves us moved, and never convinced. In order to give of his best, Galsworthy must feel the presence of a great, elementary motive—not a motive which implies a too delicate or intimate drama, but a problem, a torment, a tragedy of the whole of society, or of entire masses or classes of society. For this reason *Strife* (1909) and *The Mob* (1914) are among his best works.

Strife is the drama of the conflict between capital and labour, between lock-out and strike. Anthony is an old director of a tin works, who maintains that he has already reached the limit of concessions; Roberts is the socialist worker who organizes the strike and the resistance. At the beginning of the play a compromise is proposed, which the two opposed leaders disdainfully thrust aside: there follow sorrows and misfortunes in both parties—misery, hunger and death in the workers' families, and despair and discord among the owners. The spirit of defection and renunciation circulates in both camps; there are directors who suggest surrendering to the conditions demanded by the workers, and workers who advise submission to the will of the owners. The two leaders, who really esteem each other, although in fierce opposition, wreck every possibility of agreement, until the day in which they are cast off by their respective followers, who reach a compromise in the very terms which had been suggested at the beginning of the

long struggle. The two protagonists are beaten and destroyed; however, in a last fleeting encounter they seem to recognize each other, and to express a common contempt for the inferior, weak humanity which surrounds them and which has betrayed them. Thus there has been hunger, misery and mourning for nothing; the solution which is reached at the end of the great conflict could have been obtained at the beginning.

The theme is clear and does not require further explanation. The sense of a cruel, unjustifiable waste of human values through this ferocious battle of contrary ideas is here, as elsewhere in Galsworthy's works, perfectly rendered; and if, according to one critic, this sense of waste is one of the dominant notes in Shakespeare's tragic inspiration, then we have found a point of resemblance (perhaps the only one) between Shakespeare and Galsworthy, and also between Shakespeare and the middle-class realist drama, which often sounds this note: it suffices to quote Shaw and Granville Barker. Anthony and Roberts fight each other less for personal interests than for two opposed conceptions, two *ideas*; this battle without quarter finally harms everyone, even themselves; in such *battles of ideas* women and children starve, and precious energies are wasted. This is a very clear argument; however, the two noblest, most fervid, and definitely most admirable characters in the play are Anthony and Roberts, and they are also perhaps the two figures most loved and admired by the author. Galsworthy therefore bewails war and preaches peace, but he feels, and in some way realizes, that the highest individual virtues and the most fruitful creative powers stand rather on the side of war. Political ideas,

social principles and family traditions are all things which divide men and make them torment, fight and destroy one another; Galsworthy demonstrates this in each of his plays, and deplores it with tears in his eyes; but in each play he also feels, and to some extent shows, how much human value, how much positive *virtus*, or what unavoidable necessity, is hidden in these ideas, principles and traditions.

Thus Galsworthy is the middle-class man who feels at the same time the desire for an empiric, progressive compromise of possible alternatives, and the need for pure forces and absolute solutions. *The Mob*, again, turns on the fatality of the collective frenzy of crowds, and seems almost an epitome of the rest of his work, because here the action is purely a symbol, and it is clearly shown that the mob transforms and deforms the motives of the individuals who compose it, and even adds motives of its own, sometimes mad and ruinous, of which none of the individuals, separately, would ever have thought at all. This implies, at the same time, understanding and deploring the whole of history—understanding it with a mental or sentimental reserve, with a hidden thought that "things ought not to be like that". It is the middle classes who have clearly grasped in their minds their own contradiction, but remain attached to it by sentiment; and the principle of love, which they have glimpsed, becomes in their hands philanthropy and charity, and thus a still empiric, compromising optimism, rather than a state of being in the soul, both practical and mystical.

Among Galsworthy's many dramatic variations, some long and some very short, some more, some less fantastic, there is one, *The Little Man*, which he defines as a farcical

morality. It consists of three scenes which take place in a railway station, in a railway carriage and on an arrival platform. Men and women of various nationalities and classes are here represented in their most characteristic attitudes, and by their different reactions to the fact that a baby in long clothes has been put on the train while the mother has been left behind. The satire is for the most part good-humoured, but sometimes biting. When the rumour is spread that the innocent offender is the carrier of a terrible infectious disease, the tone passes from farcical irony almost to tragedy. In the end the baby is dandled and taken to its destination by a symbolical *little man* who seems to have neither age nor sex, and to belong a little to all nationalities. Everyone laughs at this character, but he is the only one among them all to solve effectively the delicate little problem.

This empiric kindness, this small change of charity, seems to be the unique reply which Galsworthy can suggest to the many grave questions which he asks in his works. The useful, silent and neutral *little man* is put before us as the indispensable and only hero of the new age: we seem to be already looking on at the dawn of a really perfect society, modern and communistic, which would be a great ant-heap of such *little men*; the powerful Stalin could not wish for anything better. Without noticing it, without wanting to recognize it, the modern middle classes, in this intellectual and moral examination which they have applied to themselves, have built up all the moral and intellectual justifications of Communism. For this and other reasons Communism takes its place as their natural and legitimate descendant and heir, not only in the

sphere of economics, but in that of morality and ultimately of the whole of civilization.

As the ancient peoples, in their legends and mythology, raised their primitive rulers to divinity, and made their most famous warriors into heroes, thus transporting into a mystical sphere the human forces which had best contributed to their historical formation, so the modern middle classes, unable to allow themselves these sanctifications through being Puritans and rationalists, *mysticize* the abstract forces of economics, class, competition, law, tradition and so on. People are not lacking who would make sacrifices of burnt offerings before the altar, let us say, of free trade or the fair standard of life. Art, which with every civilized people has gone side by side with religion, expressing and enriching it, has here taken the place of religion; the worship of the occult forces, of which we all feel somewhat slaves and victims in modern society, is pursued in theatres and bookshops. The drama, which at first treated and often fought these occult forces as individuated, immanent realities, now begins to feel and express them as transcendent fatalities. With Galsworthy, middle-class realism has already reached a sort of symbolism, no longer purely tragical but elegiac and lyrical. The chief characteristic and the merit of this author's work is in having brought the dramatic motive to such subtlety, to such a perfect balance of contrasts, that in it the element of drama is often superseded, and the art that remains is an expression of contemplation and resigned sorrow; it has, in fact, lyrical value. Galsworthy is *beyond* the drama; he would have to retrace his own inspiration in order to get back to the dramatic and thus obtain our more

direct agreement to his lucid and melancholy compassion for human affairs. These are characteristics which we should also find in his novels, if we were to examine them here.

After Galsworthy, excluding "provincial realism" and some later manifestations of middle-class realism which will be dealt with later, it was difficult for this form of drama to regain its original freshness and pugnacity. Galsworthy is not so much a cause of this decline, as a symptom. In him the social drama is felt as something which has already happened, as an immanent fate which is simply alluded to by symbols; which means that the dramatic force of middle-class realism, in this given historical environment and at this given moment of culture, was exhausted. This can also be noticed in writers of minor importance, such as Macdonald Hastings, who in *The New Sin* (1912) shows how in some people it may be a sort of crime to survive, when their death would bring happiness and advantages to others; and thus he raises to the rank of a fatality no longer tragically, but lyrically, felt the selfish desire for the death of others, which in certain circumstances worms its way into the hearts of even the best men.

In some ways Galsworthy may also be compared to Harold Chapin, a refined and pleasing dramatist, who, although American by birth, was purely English, or rather a Londoner, by adoption and education, so much so that he enlisted voluntarily in the British army and fell in action, in 1915, before he was thirty. He had already produced a series of plays and minor dramatic works, some of which achieve a subtle and persuasive beauty. A very

precocious actor and author, he flourished in the first decade of this century, when the English middle-class realist drama was entering its golden period, and he naturally contributed to it. His two principal works of this sort are two comedies, *Art and Opportunity* and *The New Morality*. The latter has for setting one of those house-boats on the Thames in which the rich spend their holidays; all the unities are respected, as the action takes place between half-past four and eight o'clock in the evening. It treats of the consequences of a scene which Mrs. Jones, the mistress of this house-boat, has gone to make with Mrs. Wister, the owner of the neighbouring house-boat. The two couples, the Wisters and the Joneses, were friends, but it seemed that Mrs. Wister had abused Mr. Jones's innocent admiration by making him a devoted swain, as is the custom of such women, and had made a show of her conquest among the neighbouring idle holiday-makers. The exceptionally heavy and sultry weather, her good taste and her love for her husband, have ended by prevailing over Mrs. Jones's sense of humour and powers of restraint, although she is a well-mannered and sensible woman; and so the above scene has occurred. Mr. Wister comes to demand satisfaction for the offence offered to his wife, and threatens a summons; but it is clearly seen that the poor man sympathizes with the other side, and understands perfectly the motives which impelled Mrs. Jones to her hasty act. The only one who does not understand at all is Jones himself, the young, retired colonel, who thinks only of jealousy, and goes on repeating that nothing justified this outburst of jealousy from his wife; on the contrary, in order to bring back her "sense of proportion", he insists on recounting to

her the naughtiest episodes of his past life. The man who grasps the real situation better than anyone is always the good-humoured Wister, and he, stimulated by the drinks which the Joneses have prepared to promote a friendly feeling, bursts forth into a formidable lecture on the new morality of the best modern women. This morality consists in seeing and feeling, while rising above vulgar and physical jealousy, the social, and let us say, aesthetic, interests of the man she loves, and in wanting, at any cost, that others should not make fun of him and make him cut a comic figure. In fact, he puts up a defence of Mrs. Jones, who, it is now clear, will end by sending a nice letter of apology to Mrs. Wister.

The comedy has a thin and almost silly plot, as can be seen, yet it has a freshness and a vitality which remind one of Goldoni, and reveals in the author a high degree of psychological intuition, and an attitude of contemplation so calm that it almost amounts to coldness. The English, indeed, scent a certain cynicism in this attitude, which is not surprising. In reality Chapin is morally far removed from this rich, idle society which he has set himself to portray; he takes an attitude before them not dissimilar to that of Shakespeare when he plays the part of the fool, and comments with a sort of ironical melancholy on the peculiarities of the other characters. Thus also in him the middle-class drama is inwardly superseded; his work springs from a state of mind more lyrical than dramatic, which may be defined as "aristocratic realism", besides the fact that his profound *dispassionateness* in contemplating the troubles of social life makes him feel the futility of the tragic problems raised by others and leads him to

choose subjects of such slender superficiality. Chapin is one of those new sons of the middle classes for whom the middle classes are no longer even a tragic subject, while, on the other hand, he seems too well educated to be ironical. The ironical and tragic sentiment with which he is greatly gifted shows itself rather when he contemplates the people—the eternal, universal people, who in every age and clime show the same reactions to the same stimuli. Here Chapin's dramatic instinct has to deal no longer with a determined environment and problem, with a society which is the exclusive product of a particular moment in history; it has to deal with human characteristics which history and education shape in different ways in different classes, but which in their substance always seem to remain unchanged. In the course of his brief and active career, Chapin wrote nine or ten little comedies and popular plays, for the most part in one act and in Cockney dialect, some of which remind one, both by their contents and by their merit as works of art, of the best of Italian, and especially Sicilian, provincial realism. I can imagine Angelo Musco being quite at home in the part of the old Socratic philosopher in *The Philosopher of Butterbiggins* (1915); and some of the other good Italian provincial companies could easily and successfully act *Augustus in Search of a Father* (1910), or the short and very fine *It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor*. In the latter play, Ted, a street seller, not being able to pay a fine, has to undergo a short period of imprisonment. His very young wife, with a baby a few months old, finds herself in utter poverty, unable even to buy milk and medicine for the weak and ailing baby. Finally, when the baby is dead, all the

neighbours and acquaintances, who all this time have not lifted a finger to help the unfortunate girl, and have treated her suffering as something quite normal, assemble in her little room and overwhelm her with attentions, make a collection for the baby's funeral, and even order an enlargement of one of its photographs. When this last gift is about to be brought in, Ted, the husband, returns unexpectedly, and attacks the company in a furious scene, which ends in a burst of tears.

Nothing more is needed to make us feel the profound contrast, and the sorrow, of certain human characteristics, and of certain common situations in life. In spite of his extreme youth, Harold Chapin's art seems to have reached from the first this superior grasp, this power of immediately touching the deepest chords and of stopping after having obtained from them the right tones. But dramatic works in one act are fated not to remain long on the bills of the principal theatres, but to fall into the hands of provincial companies and amateurs, thus disappearing from the notice of the great public and from "militant criticism"; this, and the early death of the author, have prevented his work from being recognized as it deserves. Or is it that middle-class instinct, which has ended by accepting (although with a smile of slight superiority) Shaw's optimistic satire, and which has sometimes gone into ecstasies over Galworthy's melancholy *problemism*, scents something strange and alien, something unassimilable, in a writer like Chapin? Perhaps behind his work there is the suggestion that the age of happy progressiveness and of optimistic compromise is destined to end; more indirectly, but more effectively than many others, he

already indicates the close of the heroic and golden age of the modern British middle classes.

With Chapin we have begun speaking of another realism, which instead of being middle class and controversial, and belonging to the town, is provincial, describes the people, and insists on sentimental rather than on rational or intellectual motives. Middle-class realism describes and debates the customs and ideas of the cultured and ruling classes, who, as it always happens in history, have hardened and set their criteria of life, and have firmly established their sense of good and evil, of the beautiful and of the ugly. Someone has justly observed that there exists a *conformity* among the modern Nordic middle classes, which extends from science to art, from morals to politics, just as there is a Catholic, an Anglican, a Mahomedan conformity, and so on. But a religious conformity is legitimate, because it is founded on absolute principles which bring in their train an integral conception of life, while the middle-class conformity is a consequence of other causes and a compromise between various principles, sometimes hostile to each other, and is only supported by a system of economic interests and social mimicry. It is therefore equivocal, and the realistic drama brought all its guns to bear on it. But in that drama there existed no radical difference between the sentiments and habits of the author and those of the figures drawn from middle-class surroundings from whom he created his characters; as I have repeated several times, it was the ruling middle classes themselves who dramatically felt their own contradictions, who held themselves up for judgement. It

was a sort of long, lively discussion between people from the same public schools, equal in education, feelings and tastes, and educated to such an extent that they were not even conscious of it. Shaw uses these people on the stage to speak his dialogues; Galsworthy likes to contrast them with other classes or social castes.

Other writers, moved by a similar impulse to get to the heart of actual problems, preferred to study other people, of a lower class and further removed from the centres from which culture and the new social customs irradiated. This impulse is an offshoot from the main stem of romanticism which on the Continent, and also in Italy, found notable followers in the second half of the nineteenth century. In England it developed later, partly as a reflection of continental examples, but also through the natural unfolding of indigenous factors, which were bound up with the middle-class self-judgement. In fact these preoccupied and moralistic playwrights of the bourgeoisie, after having shown up so many errors and contradictions in themselves, and after having completely exhausted as a theme the relics of the old noble and land-owning classes, had naturally to turn to the people of the provinces and the fields, and also the slums of the big towns, in order to see their reality more closely, and compare it with their own. At the bottom of this movement there was also the romantic motive of the "return to nature", but nature was now understood less in a pastoral spirit than in a realistic spirit from which immediately arose contrasts between dream and reality, between the myth and the fact, and drama burst forth.

This "regional realism" was also given an impulse by the

repertory theatres, which, fleeing from a wretched existence in London where they suffered too much competition from the ordinary theatres, had instead thrived in the provinces, and flourished at Manchester (founded in 1907), at Birmingham, at Liverpool and elsewhere. Their nature has already been described: they were established companies with a fixed abode, with a local public fairly well educated and trained, with artistic and not money-making aims, and with a varied repertory of choice productions, including classical, modern and very modern works. They were therefore classical and at the same time experimental theatres, *avant-garde* and "independent", but meant also for an ordinary provincial public, who were good lovers of art but not too fond of novelty. It would be out of place here to discuss the legitimacy of such attempts, and to observe that a middle-class age must have a middle-class theatre, and that an age of great speculation cannot really escape from speculation in the theatre. To call the middle classes to a theatre which tries to be non-middle-class is only to adopt an attitude of compromise; to give life to a Shakespeare who is no longer Shakespeare, to encourage the production of novelties in which the spirit is old; in fact, to attain the pseudo-new and the pseudo-antique, two similar species of *pastiche*, in which a large part of the tastes and moods of the modern middle classes is summed up.

The proof is in the fact that the Irish National Theatre, born at the same time as the repertory theatres in the English provincial towns, but in quite a different historical atmosphere which was certainly not middle class, has produced a repertory of its own which stands by itself in the

history of dramatic art, as we shall see. The English repertory theatres, on the other hand, have done nothing but accentuate more strongly the already noted characteristics of middle-class drama, and in certain cases have directly hastened its decadence. To make up for this they have stimulated provincial genius to dramatic production, and have given an impulse to "regional realism", which would have received scant encouragement from the great public in London. For example, Alan N. Monkhouse, now over seventy, a fine writer who for many years directed the literary page of the *Manchester Guardian*, was neither revealed to the public nor to himself by Miss Horniman's theatre, but at the most encouraged to bring his acute and fantastic mind to the drama. In him too the middle-class type of drama seems to be going to its decline; the drama is already superseded in his mind by a lyric-fantastical attitude; his almost imperceptible irony is nearer to Barrie than to Shaw or Galsworthy. *The Education of Mr. Surrage* was written in 1912, which stands out as the culminating and golden year of middle-class drama in England; and in this play the moral and pedagogical value of art in regard to the worthy Mr. Surrage is discussed with much vivacity and wit, in an atmosphere of vague irony which dimly recalls Flaubert and Anatole France. *The Conquering Hero* (1924) is a war play with a pacifist moral, and *Paul Felice* (1930), the last product of this fertile old age, abandons all direct social or political references, and unfolds the delicate and intimate psychological plot of a fiery and adventurous spirit which is calmed and almost subdued by the shrewd and homely affection of a woman.

Monkhouse sounds his most original note, however, in

his one-act plays and farces, in which popular realism is coupled with a fantastical or quasi-fantastical element, attaining an ironical effect which is, perhaps, not typically dramatic, but which has notable artistic merit. Such is the case in *Night Watches*, where two wounded soldiers who sleep side by side in hospital (one of them is almost deaf and dumb as the result of an explosion and talks in his sleep, giving the other the impression of fostering sinister intentions) come to hate each other fiercely through lack of mutual understanding, and are reconciled by a nurse and by an old gentleman who is acting as voluntary night watchman. Their hate was really incomprehension, and hid the deep bond of common sorrow. In *The Grand Cham's Diamond* (1918) Monkhouse is more ironical and more fantastical: a mysterious hand throws the famous diamond which has recently been stolen from the "Grand Cham" into the house of the Perkinses, a suburban middle-class family. Old Mrs. Perkins sees in this the only great, interesting and romantic event of her life, and wants to keep the diamond; but the daughter and her *fiancé* overwhelm her with reproaches and lamentations, and decide to give up the jewel. The whole merit of this little play, which cannot be described, lies in the family debate which the affair provokes: it is realism rich with sad and tender irony.

Although Miss Horniman's Manchester theatre cannot therefore boast of having discovered the artist in Monkhouse, since he was known already, or of having discovered any great dramatic artist, it did, however, discover and encourage two very remarkable Lancashire dramatists, Stanley Houghton and Harold Brighouse. The former died

very young in 1913 and did not reach his full maturity; his technique remains a little crude, and sometimes rough, but he has an immediate sense of the contrasts in the human soul, and the constant vision of environment and social atmosphere as modern equivalents to fate, which give to some of his works a dramatic importance of the highest kind. In *The Younger Generation* (1910) he treats a theme similar to that in Miss Sowerby's *Rutherford and Son*, that is, the selfishness of the elderly middle-class man steeped in Puritan ideas, and his incomprehension of the impulses and tendencies of the young; but Houghton does not want, or does not know how, to give to his hero the tragic vigour of a Rutherford, or of a Thomas Scott in the name-part of Elizabeth Baker's play. His Kennion is inclined to be comic, especially towards the end of the play, when his youthful escapades are discovered.

On the other hand, the comedy *Hindle Wakes* (1912) is notable and successful, and it discusses an aspect of the sexual problem in the society created by industrialism. Alan Jeffcote, the son of a hardworking and strait-laced manufacturer, goes off during the local wakes to spend a few days by the sea with Fanny Hawthorn, a girl of somewhat lower social position than his. The scandal makes the parents of the two truants decide that they must marry, and the weak Alan lets himself be persuaded to propose to the girl. But Fanny refuses outright: the escapade at the sea was a pastime, a joke; she does not love Alan and he is not at all the type of man she feels disposed to marry. Amidst the general confusion the comedy ends without suggesting any solution to the problem, and also without a definite dramatic conclusion. In our time it would not

raise such interest as it did in 1912, because then it made clear for the first time that in the modern industrial agglomerations, where the woman now lives and works under the same conditions as the man, there is no longer any objective reason for expecting from the girls a sexual conduct different from that which it is usual to admit and tolerate in young men. Thus there began that promiscuity and mixing of the sexes which to-day has reached alarming forms in many places, threatening the overthrow of some bases of society. One of the artistic merits of *Hindle Wakes* is that of presenting the problem with crude truth, without preaching a solution. Shaw would have made Fanny a speech-making heroine; Galsworthy would have found the means to sympathize with someone or something. Houghton is like Hankin and Chapin; reality, even *in minimis*, seems to him already so much that there is no need to add to it our elaborate sentimentalisms or personal doctrines; fate, which the multitudinous, ant-like society of our time represents to every sensitive and keen mind, does not need comments and perhaps does not allow remedies: it is sufficient to give the facts as they stand for the tragedy to emerge. This is the realism that the English of the more ordinary type define as cynical; but which I, on the other hand, will risk calling *aristocratic*, based as it is on a bold, unprejudiced and disinterested movement of the mind towards all the realities of life. It is also a less dramatic realism than the rhetorical and affecting kind of other older writers, because the author is already resigned to some extent, and the state of his mind is rather lyrical, although the characters and situations which he presents may arouse dramatic emotion in the less disposed, pre-

pared and expert minds of many listeners. It is an elect, clear and superior art, but one in which the dramatic element is already declining. This is also true of Houghton's other comedies and farces, the one-act plays of provincial lower middle-class life, such as *The Dear Departed*, where the satirical intent, if there is any, is wholly determined by the crude and direct frankness of the realistic representation.

Harold Brighouse is a more varied writer, with a spirit capable of greater sympathy and emotion; his inspiration is thus more purely dramatic, although in him the tragic easily assumes an elegiac or imaginative tone and action, and usually disguises itself with humour. *Hobson's Choice* is perhaps the work which has won him the most renown, in America as well as England, but his one-act plays and comedies on realistic themes drawn for the most part from Lancashire people are better, or at least more characteristic. Perhaps the most effective example of this type is the short play *The Price of Coal* (1909), in which is shown the tragedy that hangs over work in the mines as reflected in the life of a family of Scotch miners. The one-act comedy *Lonesome Like* (1911) is excellent, and typical of Lancashire: here the two central characters are an old woman, a workman's widow, who is ejected from the cottage where she has passed her whole life, and prepares to go to the workhouse, and a young workman, strange, taciturn and slightly ridiculous, who wants to marry a girl, a friend of the widow's, but is refused. In the last scene, when the preparations for departure are nearly finished and the poor old woman is getting ready to end her days in squalid misery, the young man returns and makes a strange kind

of declaration to her: he feels himself doomed to solitude, girls do not look at him or else laugh at him, and yet he does not want to live alone; he proposes to the old woman, who, touched, accepts, to go and end her days in his house. The language and the types are taken straight from the people; but the subtle and acute melancholy which pervades the short comedy is neither of a popular nor of a middle-class quality: it is a sure and superior artistic effect. The tragic background is provided by the unrelieved monotony and sadness of the little industrial suburb where the action takes place; here also we are in the atmosphere of that detached, dispassionate, aristocratic realism, with which some of the middle classes contemplated, and made their public feel, the muffled tragedy inherent in the conditions of life created by industrialism.

In *Hobson's Choice*, on a popular plane, we return to the old theme of the severity and incomprehension of the father towards the sons, of the old towards the young, of the man used to Puritan conventions and hypocrisies towards the modern spirit. Here, again, old Hobson is the prototype of complete selfishness, a bully, convinced of his own superior reasoning, sure of possessing absolute rights over the destinies of his daughters and his dependants. In his little cobbler's shop he rules with an iron rod; the two daughters serve in the shop, and Willie, the workman, seems to be doomed to a perpetual and obscure servitude. But Hobson is really an old toper who has lost all his business energy, and Willie is an excellent workman who ends by marrying Maggie, one of the daughters, and starts a flourishing business of his own. Finally Hobson, ruined by drink, has to give up his shop to his son-in-law,

and put himself under the complete control of his daughters; this is the only possible "Hobson's choice". The whole of the action is rich, natural and animated; much local colour is brought in, but carefully, without falling into affectation and mannerism, and the birth of a new lower middle-class family from an extinct working-class stock is drawn with a clear and delicate touch. Here Brighouse is jovial and a little worldly, with no problems tormenting him very deeply, but possessing a marvellous dramatic technique and making use of his remarkable gifts of observation and imagination. He is versatile, and likes to meet the various demands of his public: he has shown this by his *Plays for the Meadow and Plays for the Lawn*, intended for amateurs who want to act in country-house gardens—light, imaginative pieces, which have enjoyed wide popularity; and also recently by *Coincidence*, performed in America in 1929, where satire on the elections is joined to a strange and almost Rocambolesque plot, and where crowd-psychology is the subject of sharp irony. It is a work which echoes the tendencies of the most modern drama, and reveals, if nothing else, the still lively invention of the author.

Realism, which had such a hard struggle to make itself accepted on the stage and to reach a dramatic form acceptable to the public, has now got so firm a grasp of the theatrical medium as to be sometimes more *theatrical* than artistic. This is the case in some of Charles McEvoy's Cockney comedies, and in *David Ballard*, a play which is both realistic and melodramatic. In the same way Eden Phillpotts obtained an enormous success with *The Farmer's Wife*, a pleasant, realistic country farce, with Devonshire

dialect and background, which was still successful when it was recently revived. It is about a prosperous farmer who wants to marry, and considers all the possible matches in the neighbourhood, but ends by marrying a faithful servant, who has been his confidante and adviser in the long and fruitless search. Here we are plainly dealing with that type of light, gay and slightly conventional drama of dialect, of which there have also been noteworthy examples in Italy; it is a mixture of charm, a carefully measured dose of truth, much local colour, a little irony, and above all great dramatic ability. The same can be said of Phillpotts's other works, numerous and very varied in character.

Those who want to make a study of English provincial realism will find a large field of drama, not always very striking as regards artistic merit. I must confine myself here to a few summary indications. Among Lancashire writers we may mention further Gilbert Cannan, who played such a part in the creation of the Manchester Repertory Theatre, and J. L. Hodson; Yorkshire provided F. W. Moorman, Dorothy Una Ratcliffe, James R. Gregson and Gwen John, who sometimes laid her scenes in Derbyshire. John Oswald Francis, a Welshman, obtained a prize in 1912 with *Change*, a domestic and realistic comedy, where play is again made with the idea of the changed spirit of different generations; but he is perhaps more lively and effective in his short and long plays and comedies of Welsh environment, such as *Birds of a Feather*, in one act, which recalls certain Irish writers pretty closely. Other Welsh writers are Jannette Marks, who is less important, and Caradoc Evans, who in *Taffy* (1924)

presented lively scenes of Welsh rustic life. From time to time the Scotch argue and debate about a drama of their own; but as the ancient English joke goes, the most genuine Scotchmen are to be found in London, and indeed one sees every day in the London theatres the works of the best living Scotch writers, such as Barrie. The latter, although in youth he belonged to the "Scotch kailyard" school (which contained poets and novelists as well as dramatists), has on the whole sounded a note which is neither provincial nor local, and we must speak of him elsewhere. Of the local Scotch realists I will limit myself therefore to mentioning the names of Donald Colquhoun, John McIntyre and David Cleghorn Thomson, who published in 1930 his interesting *Five One-Act Plays for a Scots Theatre*, of which the best is perhaps *No Room at the Inn*. Macdonald Watson uses Scotch, and sometimes Irish, environments for his plays, and W. W. Gibson, in his plays and dialogues, has been principally inspired by Northumberland. Turning to Cockney, we find the lower middle-class farces of Gertrude E. Jennings, which have had a certain popularity.

England was slowly remodernizing itself, revising its own ideas and customs. I have said that 1912 was the golden year for that "aristocratic realism" by means of which the most sensitive and attentive minds pressing even the drama into service brought to an end their indictment of history and of the contemporary civilization of their country, and, without condemning anything, or depreciating anyone, portrayed nevertheless the black side of life and of the national character, thus fixing the problems

which might mature and become a path to concrete developments in the next age. Shaw, with all his superior talent, was still *in* the middle classes; even his Communism is middle class, because Communism is a middle-class idea, a Puritan ideology matured in the brain of a German Jew. Collectivism and collaboration, in our modern beehive society, represent the goal for middle-class mentality: it is deprecated by the arty ones who worship tradition and fill their houses with pseudo-antique furniture, and is upheld by those who are more Puritan and fanatical, and by the *younger sons*, whose intelligence never ceases to obey a congenital rancour. Shaw, without ever sparing his satire of the one or the other, has remained, and will die, essentially faithful to that type of young Puritan, Ibsenite, and Socialist, which everyone has known him to be for the last forty years: the two periods which can vaguely be defined in his work, and which we have noticed, reveal a development of the intellect and of artistic technique, not a radical crisis or change of character; they mark a branching of his inspiration towards different motives, but not a different kind of inspiration.

English dramatic realism has therefore already gone a long way beyond Shaw in the historical and cyclical significance of its inspiration, although it has perhaps never surpassed him in artistic merit. Already before the war the surviving elements of the great Victorian epoch were starting on a slow and glorious decline, illuminated by an ever brighter and newer spiritual light, which seemed to herald the dawn of a different, and perhaps better, civilization. The industrial and urban collectivism, brought by the middle-class epoch, by that time constituted a reality of

fact, of which the new dramatists had delineated with objective firmness and a high serenity all the moral characteristics, while suggesting the terms of the new problems. But collectivism can no longer be a goal for our civilization, because we have reached it already. By a curious but not surprising paradox of history, we have reached it against our will, through the exasperation of middle-class individualism. It is not therefore a point of arrival, but it may be a point of departure; our civilization is already socialistic in the reality of its principal interconnections, and its problems can only come to be felt, presented, and historically surpassed, by a mentality which is later in time than that of socialism—in other words, a later mentality than that of the middle class of which I have spoken in these pages. For socialism is nothing but the modern middle class regarding its own image, opposing and criticizing itself, always in terms of its own mentality. This class, historically fixed, has fulfilled its function and is now exhausting its cycle; the future belongs to those peoples who can find a way which does not start from a middle-class premise, and who can renew their ancient line in a quite new creative order. England, at the dawn of this century, showed signs of setting forth on these new ways confusedly; her intellectuals and artists, the advance-guards of history, had reached a seriousness and serenity in contemplating social difficulties, which seemed to announce and anticipate the birth of a new form of post-middle-class aristocracy; and the wealth and power which the nations enjoyed guaranteed that the new developments would have unfolded themselves in an atmosphere of relative calm.

This process was interrupted and upset by the war.

Italians have difficulty in realizing what the war meant to England. In Italy it swept away many things which had survived from a dead past, and opened up vast possibilities and new needs, chiefly in the field of morals and politics. In England, on the other hand, it caused a general mobilization, and a rapid wearing-out of all the moral and material forces which then so richly existed. Owing to the system of voluntary enlistment it happened that of the young men of a generation which to-day should have gradually assumed the direction of the spiritual and public life of the nation, the best, the most determined, the truest and the most gifted with "social sense", crowded the first divisions mobilized for France and were shot down, almost annihilated, on the tragic plains of Flanders. The war over, Great Britain, although she had gained in colonies and mandates, found America at her heels, now a power of the first importance and a menace in every field, France opposite her, pursuing her eternal continental policy, Soviet Russia hostile, India in rebellion, China in chaos, and Japan grown larger, not to mention other grave and acute internal difficulties in the Empire, in Ireland, South Africa and Australia. Thus, to Britain's disadvantage, the political system of the world was upset, as was also, to her immediate and serious loss, the economic system, in which all the prerogatives and advantages which she had once enjoyed were destroyed or seriously compromised. If one adds to this the moral relaxation which followed the great accomplished effort, and all the national and international complications of the ten years after the war, one realizes how the war for England represented a total crisis—not a crisis of development, but of weariness and decline—and

how to-day all her pre-war problems must seem reversed, upset or shifted on to insecure, and mainly new, foundations. The conservatism of the English character was put to a hard test; all the compromises which seemed most thoroughly settled were called in question again. The historical process of modern English civilization, which up to 1914 had followed a very smooth and continuous line, was suddenly cut short, shaken, and in some respects undone.

This is also noticeable in the drama. Since the war, the young writers have shown signs of more direct contact with continental and American literature, of feeling foreign influences more strongly (especially American and Russian), and of being much freer with regard to the old path of British tradition. As a rule they have also been less creative and less sure of themselves; they seem to have lost their traditional and conventional sense of technique; with little conviction, and often with little success, they have attempted the new techniques which were suggested from abroad. The main stock of the great modern English drama seems to be exhausted: a few writers, however, from among the survivors of the preceding age, still succeed in showing signs of life and originality, and among these is St. John Ervine.

Born in Belfast but educated in England, Ervine was among those young men who at the beginning of this century were attracted by the reformatory and scientific socialism of the Fabian Society. In those surroundings he knew Shaw and other more or less young artists and men connected with the stage, and was initiated into the mysteries of the independent and repertory theatres. In

fact, in 1915–16, he was manager of the Irish National Theatre, where he produced the most notable group of his works. But the connection between Ervine and the Irish theatre, apart from the quality of his works, was accidental and of brief duration. By birth, education and temperament, Ervine was very unsuited to get on with the Dubliners; in fact he left them, shaking the dust off his feet, and in 1920 wrote a mediocre though witty little comedy, *The Island of Saints and the Way to get out of it*, which was his Parthian shot.

Ulster is peopled with a mixture of Saxon, Danish and Scottish elements, strictly Protestant, Unionist, Orangist and industrial, in contrast to the southern counties of Ireland, whose inhabitants are Celtic, Catholic, Separatist and agricultural; one must keep this in mind to understand how Ervine, an Ulsterman educated in England, finds himself in a characteristic and privileged position for understanding and feeling deeply, but always with a certain sentimental detachment, the problems and dramas of his three countries, so close but so different and discordant; and how his work, although historically bound up with the heyday of the Irish Theatre, of which I shall speak at greater length elsewhere, does not belong to it in its inward spirit, and yet is detached from local realism and from the problemistic realism of the English.

All Ervine's first plays treat of Irish problems, and reveal in the author the attitude of one who, although feeling profoundly the motives he contrasts on the stage, can yet judge them from above, and remain impartial and serene. This impassibility benefits the drama, because it allows the opposing motives to clash according to their interior

dramatic law, without diverting or forcing them into any direction which might serve to demonstrate a particular thesis. Here, therefore, we have a realism which has no other source or driving power except the fatal contrast of passions which the author feels and knows because they are part of his own nature, experience and education, so different and so varied. In him, therefore, there is neither the proselytism of the controversialists, nor the Regionalists' love of their birthplace, nor even the detached, aristocratic lyrism of other more mature realists; in him the dramatic force springs from the many elements which have helped to form his character, and he enjoys seeing it gather strength and burst forth. He feels, I should say, rather a stranger everywhere, and a little critical of everything; in the depth of his personality there is a cold region of something like boredom with other people's agitations and of an understanding more keen than sympathetic. So it is not surprising that for many years Ervine has been, among other things, an authoritative dramatic critic.

In *Mixed Marriage* (1911) the son of a Belfast Protestant worker, supported by his brother (revolt of the young generation against the prejudices of the old), wants to marry a Catholic. This contrast is interwoven with a disturbance among the workers, in which all three characters are implicated. But the old Protestant father prefers to see the strike fail rather than see his son married to a "Cathlik", and the girl is killed by a stray bullet on a day of demonstration. This event gives force to the action on the stage, but is not essential to the dramatic element, which lies entirely in the sad and dreary victory of ancient bigotry and prejudice over the dictates of youth, which in

this case are the dictates of the heart and of class war. In *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912), in one act, a theme is developed similar to that of Houghton's *Hindle Wakes:* Henry Hinde has seduced Maggie Cather and has fled to England to escape the consequences; after some years, and after having made a little money, he is seized with remorse and returns to his country to do his duty like a gentleman; Maggie, however, must clearly understand that she is a "fallen woman", and that therefore his marrying her is only an act of noble generosity. Maggie, like Houghton's Fanny Hawthorn, refuses this marriage offered as a concession, and maintains that, if anything, they have both fallen together. The analogy with *Hindle Wakes* is thus only exterior, in the fact. There, Fanny has not been seduced, but has treated herself to an amusement, and then refuses to marry the "seducer" simply because he does not seem to her a suitable husband; she is a prototype of those modern girls who have grown up in the big urban and industrial centres; Maggie Cather, on the other hand, is a poor country girl, who has been made materially, and refuses to be also made morally, the victim of a man. Ervine's theme is thus less interesting as a criticism of contemporary society, but it attacks a universal masculine tendency in judging the sexual honesty of the woman.

The Dublin critics having stupidly condemned this play, Ervine satirized them in a witty little comedy, *The Critics*, which was performed in 1913. In 1914 he produced *The Orangeman*, in one act, a bold, biting satire on the Orangist fanaticism of his Belfast compatriots; and in 1915 the National Theatre of Dublin played *John Ferguson*, Ervine's masterpiece. John is an Ulster peasant, an ailing old man

attached to his farm, on which, however, there lies a heavy mortgage in favour of Witherow, the local miller, a type of petty country tyrant. Andrew, the son, is unable to help his father, and Witherow is about to take possession of the farm. At this point there intervenes a mean, vile character, Jimmy, the local grocer, who hates Witherow, and offers to redeem the mortgage if Hannah, Ferguson's daughter, will consent to marry him; to which offer he is moved, not only by Hannah's beauty, but also by the fact that she is loved by the hated Witherow. Hannah sees that her consent can save the whole family, and is about to grant Jimmy's request, but John Ferguson feels the enormity of the sacrifice which is asked of his daughter, and prevents her from making it. Then it is discovered that Hannah has been seduced by Witherow, and Jimmy, trembling with fear and cold, goes out at night, armed with a gun, swearing revenge. The next morning he returns, reduced to a rag, and confesses that he did not have the courage to kill. But Witherow is found murdered shortly afterwards, Jimmy is arrested, and there is no doubt that the severe English law will send him to the gallows. The play is nearing its end when it is revealed that the murderer was Andrew, Hannah's brother: Ferguson, who all through the preceding events has strictly followed the precepts of the Bible, according to his severe Protestantism, now has a moment of weakness and tries to persuade his son to escape. Instead, Andrew goes with Hannah to give himself up to the police, and in the last scene John and his wife, left alone, try to comfort themselves by reading the Bible, at the passage where David weeps for the death of Absalom.

The plot has melodramatic moments, and contains some improbabilities (above all, Witherow's seduction of Hannah); the tragedy, all the same, maintains a high and constant level, thanks to the sad and heroic figure of Ferguson, a kind of ascetic and martyr of the strictest Protestantism, whose loyalty to religious principle is maintained and exalted, through the continuous and terrible trials, up to the moment of final weakness, and to that sorrowful return to the Bible with the hope of finding a consolation now rendered impossible. It is a very significant paradox that this unique epic-tragical exaltation of the Protestant faith in modern English drama should come from the Fabian, free-thinking Ervine, born in Ulster, and author, as we have seen, of satirical works aimed against the Puritan fanaticism of his compatriots. Ervine feels the human greatness of John Ferguson's Protestant faith, because his spirit is naturally foreign to the ancient, classical, English compromise, which was spoken of at some length at the beginning of this book; but at the same time he does not feel any need or desire to propagate or defend this faith. It is enough for him to present it in its most tragic greatness. Thus in *Jane Clegg* he presents, in a sordid lower middle-class environment, the vigorous and almost heroic character of a woman who succeeds in keeping herself aloof amid corruption, and ends by chasing her abject husband out of the house. It is clear that Ervine tends to express, through characters and situations which recall those of provincial realism, purely dramatic motives which have both originality and universality; in fact his central problem is only an artistic one.

All this explains perhaps why Ervine's work remained

more *alive* after the war: his inspiration and his success were less bound to a fixed historical environment, to a fixed spiritual atmosphere, which the war had overturned. After the war Ervine wrote *The Ship* (1922), inferior to his other works in artistic value, but remarkable for the effort to keep in tune with new times, and for expressing the characteristic and widespread post-war horror of machines —the contrivances which man seems to have created stronger than himself, and which now subjugate and appear to crush him. In 1929, if I am not mistaken, came *The First Mrs. Fraser*, a modern middle-class comedy which had a great success, and which also treats quite a contemporary theme. "The First Mrs. Fraser" has been divorced by her husband, who wanted to marry a much younger and more modern girl, a prototype of that vast and growing category of *demi-vierges* which the war seems to have multiplied to infinity. After a few years the absurdity of this second marriage is revealed, and the first Mrs. Fraser has to intervene, lead her rival to an open confession of adultery, and free the husband, who now, wishing to remarry her, has to court her again like a young man. Here again two generations are compared, the old and the new: but something serious has happened. Here, if anyone is judged, it is the younger generation, while the moral solidity of the older generation is shown. It seems that the revolt of anti-middle-class realism has completed its circle; the virtues of the past, which present conditions seem to have destroyed, are regarded with longing; there is something melancholy and depressing in the air, like the sense of an impending decadence.

Half-way between the old and the new is also Miss

Clemence Dane, who attempted the drama of re-evocation and historical reconstruction in *William Shakespeare* (1921), and who in *A Bill of Divorcement*, of the same year, treated a difficult and unpleasant theme with remarkable dramatic success. This is the story of a war invalid who has remained shut up in an asylum for many years, while his wife (under a law which in reality did not exist, but which the author was anxious should be passed) has obtained a divorce and is about to marry again. The invalid returns, cured, to find himself in this cruel situation, which, however, according to Miss Dane, obeys a higher and more fertile law of human justice. The merit of the play consists in the author's having created drama from the two opposed figures of the husband and wife, both worthy, in different ways, of admiration and sympathy, and in having struck a blow for her thesis while expressing all the tragedy of the man who suffers by it. Conventionalism of the old stamp does not fail to find expression in some rather stock characters, such as an old cousin and a pedantic clergyman; the new element consists in the feminine sensibility of the author, which succeeds in sympathizing, and making us sympathize, with her victim, in the very act of victimizing him. But it is clear that Miss Dane is still a middle-class Protestant who wants to break away from the traditional compromises, and thrust her moral and social principles to their ultimate logical consequences. There is thus a hint of changed times, but we are really still in the sphere in which Shaw moved.

With C. K. Munro we pass into quite a different atmosphere, which one cannot now call contemporary, because tastes change rapidly to-day, but which is characteristic of the first ten years after the war. Things are seen as if

through the eyes of Lazarus who has crossed the zone of death, and now seems to discover life anew; and who, in order to convey this vision to the eyes of common mortals, inserts a fantastic element, or an arbitrary alteration of tones and proportions, into the photographic reality, so that the real appears transformed by it, or, to use a word dear to many modern painters, is rendered metaphysical. Thus *At Mrs. Beam's* (1921) has for theme the sojourn of two adventurers wanted by the police in the decorous, chilly, funereal and tragically conventional environment of a small London boarding-house. The whole play is an airy and clever display of disproportions, as if a gale was shown blowing in a box of shabby old knick-knacks. There is irony and satire in the presentation of all the pallid and half-spent characters who inhabit Mrs. Beam's boarding-house, but the ultimate purpose is neither satirical nor controversial; Munro wants to give us, and succeeds in giving us, the immediate feeling of a vast and tormented world, which moves outside the sad, dull surroundings of these innumerable London boarding-houses, full of small clerks and retired officers, of unlucky old business men and spinsters of every age living on minute incomes.

Storm, or the Battle of Tinderley Down (1924), is similar to the former comedy in atmosphere and in the play of technique; on the other hand, *Mr. Eno* (1930) is decidedly symbolistic and surrealistic, and shows the influence of intimism and expressionism. By all these long words I mean that the play represents, in numerous very rapid scenes, a synthetic and symbolic picture of the life of a lower middle-class family through three generations. Mr. Eno is "one substance in three persons", grandfather,

father and son; all three are modest bank clerks, and all three are fatally set going on the same *cursus vitae*, similar in virtues, defects and idiosyncrasies, although very different in individual character. The play, which did not have a success, has a dark, vibrant beauty of its own; it recalls Pirandello, and the *abgeschmackt* post-war German drama. At the core it has the same merit as the other comedies mentioned: the real is presented through the fantastic in a different light, which in a certain sense is more real than reality. In it the place of the fantastic element is taken by an extremely free and elastic use of stage convention.

A controversial side of Munro, still aided by fantasy, appeared with *Progress* and above all *The Rumour* (1922); the latter demonstrates how a world war can spring from the irresponsible schemings of a few bankers and politicians, and is a fierce indictment of certain English political customs and traditions. This play, technically imperfect, has gained more fame than popularity, and is no longer performed to-day. But here too it is to be observed that the fantastic, in Munro's works, is not a goal or a profound mode of inspiration, inclining towards the lyrical (as in Barrie, and in others I have indicated); it is instead the author's instrument for evoking tragedy; and tragedy springs, not so much from a play of contrasts in action, as from the feeling of society as *fate*, as the tool of a monstrous predestination governing all individual affairs.

J. R. Ackerley, still younger than Munro, gave us in *The Prisoners of War* (1925) a wholly psychological and interior tragedy, without any apparent plot, without even a change of scene. We see the slow and sordid decline of

the mind of a Conrad, a more intelligent and sensitive prisoner of war than his companions, through the degrading and wearing monotony of servitude and communal life. It is a meritorious play, if not altogether successful, and of a type of which modern English drama furnishes very few examples.

This last phase of tragic and despairing realism, fantastic or intimate, which carries to its close the tradition of polemical middle-class drama and pushes the impulse of "social remorse" to its extremes, continues up to the present day, and traces of it will be found again in some of the works of which I will speak in the last chapter of this book. With the addition of Freudism and the exasperated modern preoccupation with sexuality, it leads to O'Neill in America and to D. H. Lawrence in England. But Lawrence's dramatic works, except perhaps for *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, in which a mining tragedy is portrayed with this author's usual crudeness and immediacy, though they contain some of the merits of his other works, do not possess a striking dramatic quality. Lawrence's inspiration is always a little dull and confused, but in its happy moments it reaches an epic, and never entirely a dramatic beauty.

In conclusion, the drama born from the need to review and criticize middle-class civilization found, at a certain moment, that it lacked an object to attack and air to breathe. The war had utterly revolutionized too many things, and in unforeseen directions. The post-war period in England, dramatic in itself, has not given rise to a new dramatic creativeness; perhaps it never will.

V

THE REVIVAL OF FANTASY

Barrie and Masefield · Yeats, Flecker, Dunsany · Historical and anecdotic drama · Housman, Drinkwater and others

WHEN the artist sees, feels and expresses objectivity, it means that the object has taken an image, thus becoming artistically natural and almost tangible. Thus love can be felt and sung without a precise object, and then it is a purely epic motive: but when love becomes Ophelia or Francesca, then it assumes a definite appearance, a definite soul, which fix, limit and, in a way, break it up. Then we are in the atmosphere of drama. Between two persons there can be no epic, only drama: but for the poet the *other* person is an image; so is the *other* thing, and in fact, *otherness*. Now, all the realism of which I have so far spoken must necessarily appear dramatic, in the sense that it is a progressive feeling and expression of a reality as *otherness*, as a limit, as fate: and therefore, in the more important plays, it is not so much a conscious criticism of that reality as a comic or tragic apprehension and expression of it. It is England, having given a definite and successful form to her historic reality, suddenly looking up to find herself its prisoner. The epic enthusiasm of creators of a new world has given place to the drama of men who feel the bondage and the internal contrasts of the world so

created, who come up against a barrier that they themselves have made. Yet, even so, the English spirit could not wholly lose its natural qualities or its tendency to compromise and find empirical short-cuts. And the empiric, in art, means fantasy: that is, not the *impossible* (for that does not exist in art or anywhere else), not the certain, not the true, not the right, and not the uncertain, the ambiguous or the wrong, but simply the *possible*; I mean, that which, with the exercise of invention, *can* be done.

Fantasy is a conscious breaking free from experienced reality, the terms of which are not changed, but simply put aside. There is a profound need for self-liberation, for casting off shackles, at the base of the history, institutions and social habits of the British. And therefore the drama, the ineluctable otherness, which in this race of strong and primitive impulses arises at long intervals and is expressed in unmistakeable accents, finds an outlet in fantasy rather than in philosophical speculation. In this process they reveal a freshness of blood, an eternal youthfulness, springing up again after every catastrophe and every defeat. This childlike eagerness, this urge of an untutored will, is to be found in all whose fancy roams, even in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. And this lyrism, just because it contains something innocent and childish, can at any moment give rise to another, and epic, current. It may be that this will prevent a full, mature civilization, of universal and perpetual value, from ever flourishing on British soil: but it will also prevent total decadence and corruption without hope.

The old formal lyrism, in face of the new artistic drama,

had died with the last glories and misfortunes of the spoken melodrama, but when, thanks to innovators, stage technique improved a little, and managers, actors and audience had a finer sensibility and a more attentive ear, the old lyrism rose up again, and this time found a new form, more artistically valuable. When Gordon Craig, at the end of the first decade of this century, rose up to preach against the *realism* of productions, he expressed a need which had never wholly disappeared from English taste: in particular he opened the door to a new form of stage illusionism, and heralded the invasion of mimes of the latest brand—Isadora Duncan and the Russians. Craig dealt chiefly with the problems of production, that is to say, he raised a technical question among technicians; but it does not matter to criticism if a piece of scenery is authentic or only indicated; technique as such should never be criticized, because criticism should refer to the total artistic result and nothing else. Craig's attack came after the long, dull war of the old criticism against theatrical realism and Ibsenism, and seemed like a battle won by an entirely new and fresh ally, who had suddenly appeared on the field. In reality this was, if anything, a new victory of the hidden Romantic spirit of realism itself; it only meant that the conventions of the older realism were now opposed by other conventions which answered the needs of a drama which was also realistic at heart, although the reality inspiring it was intimate, subjective, psychological, even deceptive—the kind of drama which has flourished all over Europe, and in America, for the last twenty years.

But the revival of the imperishable British fantasy, at once utilitarian and childish, always open to the epic

impulse even in its extreme lyrical ramblings, had begun before this. The very leaders of the dramatic renaissance, the first real dramatists who had driven the pure poets and the adapters from the play-bills, had themselves immediately yielded to the temptation to better the position of the lyrical and the imaginative on the stage. Though Ibsen seemed to point to the arduous and severe path of duty, leading to Art and Truth, even the most educated members of the public continued to favour lyrism and fantasy: the melodious nightingale hidden in the hearts of our playwrights had a voice which had an excellent effect on the box-office receipts. Pinero obtained a great success in 1888 with *Sweet Lavender*, a sentimental fantasy: and he returned several times to this form, perfecting it, making use of the experience of others, studying Barrie's symbolism, and nearing the *intimist* tendency of this century. In 1922 he produced a little jewel with *The Enchanted Cottage*. A wounded war veteran (wounded also in his affections and in his soul) falls in love with the woman who nurses him, and loves him, through a sort of enchantment which makes her appear as the ideal woman, the centre of an ideal life in an ideal rustic dwelling. In reality the woman is not beautiful, the enchanted cottage is an uncomfortable hovel in the middle of the fields, and the life which is led there would appear, in other circumstances, intolerable. What is the enchantment, the philtre which reverses everything, and makes valueless things valuable? The author has happily presented the imaginative symbol, in a dramatic form, of a simple moral truth—that life gives to us according as we give to it, and as love is an impulse to give and renounce ourselves, that which we give in loving returns to us

through everything, like a miraculous enrichment. Here, in this play, imagination creates a symbol; the author's dramatic practice furnishes a technique; and the feeling expressed, that of love creating, attains such a freshness and linear simplicity as to suggest epical inspiration.

The defect of this play, and of others of the same type of which we will speak, is not to be found in this mixture of different elements; we separate these elements in the abstract for critical reasons, but we must not be prejudiced against the concrete union of what we separate in the abstract: the fact is that here the epic-lyrical motive does not attain dramatic form and intensity; the presence of the imaginative symbol hinders the full development of the dramatic pathos. The same observation must be made with regard to Barrie, especially for those of his works where the magic symbol is not reduced to a minimum; the same more or less applies to all this *magic* drama, so popular among the Anglo-Saxons. In the case of the English this reawakening, or return, of epic-lyrical forms on the stage was not, as it often is, decadence, or a sign of decadence. It is the old barbaric and childish imagination of the sagas, destined always to occupy a large part of the spirit of this people, who still to-day are among the most purely *Germanic* and childish nations. It is an imagination favoured by the perpetual mists of the country, which simply turns towards magic, but does not attribute to magic that power of supernatural, hostile and malignant intervention, as southern peoples tend to do. Here, on the contrary, the magic power or manifestation, issuing from the mists, the waters, the dense leafy woods or the mysterious hollows of ancient trees, is felt for the most part as a familiar and

friendly intervention, born from the deepest and most intimate roots of the race, and as one which takes upon itself to bring to the affairs of men, from beyond reality, precisely that element of the "empiric possible alternative" of which we have seen the importance in the English spirit.

Thus there are many writers who like to imagine they are always children, and who invent and write as such, finding a large response, not only from childish audiences, but more still from adults. The fairy plays are innumerable, but as they have not always great artistic merit it will suffice to recall the names of E. Harcourt Williams, who has rewritten excellently for the stage some of the best-known fairy tales, such as *Puss in Boots*, *Beauty and the Beast* and others; Lady Margaret Sackville, whose best pieces are specially dedicated to children; Alfred Noyes, who, with *Robin Hood*, a pastoral fable in verse, won great popularity; William Sharp, who, under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod, was an imaginative story writer, poet and dramatist, interested in folklore, and who among other things left a Celtic legend play, *The Immortal Hour*, which was taken up a few years after his death and set to music by Boughton; Frank Nesbitt, who also wrote a collection of little fairy plays; Gordon Bottomley, who tried to achieve poetic tragedy by using already famous pseudo-historical and literary material, as in *King Lear's Wife*, or in *Britain's Daughter*; Stephen Phillips, who aimed at the same ends in his many works, whose subjects range from *Ulysses* to *Nero's Mother* and *Paolo and Francesca*, and who went on writing up to the Great War, of which he only saw the beginning, as he died in 1915. There are many other names

which could be mentioned here, but as this book does not aim at being complete in every detail, they must of necessity be left out.

Magic fantasy, childish feeling and nostalgia for childhood combined in suggesting to James M. Barrie the creation of *Peter Pan or the Boy who would not Grow Up* (1904). Those who do not understand Peter Pan, or do not see that *Peter Pan* is a serious, and in a certain sense a fundamental, work to the English mind, must give up trying to understand England or anything in it. Peter Pan represents a universal motive, though in England it has a much greater importance than elsewhere. If we compare, for example, Peter Pan and the Italian Pinocchio, apart from the artistic value of the two works, we find that their allusive and symbolical value is entirely different. Pinocchio is the prototype of the reckless, jolly urchin, but Peter Pan is the boy "who would not grow up", the quintessential and eternal boy; perhaps too quintessential and eternal, too symbolical, at least for the Italians, who perhaps recognize more easily certain aspects of their childhood in the puppet-like pranks of Pinocchio; they recognize in him the companions with whom they played, quarrelled and exchanged stamps and pen nibs. Collodi's genius is shown in this simple but superior realism, in giving artistic life to some of the real characteristics of all the children of one nation. Peter Pan, on the other hand, does not actually resemble any real boy, because in him are summed up all the salient characteristics of all real boys; and yet his imaginative reality is so well re-lived in the writer's soul, and vibrates so in unison with his whole personality, that

he is no longer a cleverly constructed puppet, but a real person. Peter Pan is the lyrical confession of James Barrie the Scotchman, later a baronet of the United Kingdom; he is the personification of his imaginative ideas, which express also his best hopes, desires and dreams. Thus Peter Pan, born as a character of a composite and autobiographical lyrism, acquires an independent, unified life, in which the apparent caprice hides a force, a direction and a real law: it is fantasy which in its own way has become will again, not the disturbed and distorted will of post-Romantics or decadents, but the ingenuous and direct will of a child; the lyrical phantom comes to life in an epic song of liberation in childishness. It is characteristic of Peter Pan that he has no drama, just as he has no sorrow; drama and sorrow are definitely precluded for "the boy who does not grow up". Only at the end of the third act, when he fears to be submerged by the rising waters of the mermaids' lagoon, he feels his heart beating "as if he were a real boy at last" and murmurs, "To die will be an awfully big adventure". All his other adventures are very exciting but destined to a happy end, because "the boy who would not grow up" is the eternal little boy hidden in us of whom Pascoli speaks, who "does not want, and does not know how to die", who would never want to reach the drama of life, or reality.

Peter Pan, the character, is not dramatic, and neither is the action as far as it refers to him. The parents, however, who see their offspring unexpectedly disappear, the lost boys who surround the hero, Wendy, who seems to nourish a precocious feeling for the impossible boy (without his understanding in the least what is expected of him),

and the family dog who laments the escape of her little charges, are all figures which have a principle of real personality, and for that reason blossom into the dramatic. When the children return to home and reality, after having lost themselves in a marvellous dream, the incorrigible Peter abandons them and never returns again. On the other hand, J. M. Barrie returns, to follow these children, or others similar to them, on the path of life, towards real, adult existence, towards drama and reality. But as in their childhood Peter Pan flew in at the open window of their night-nursery one spring night, and took them away with him to the Never Never Land, so now, when they are grown up, there returns instead James Barrie himself, always ready to insert a magical element into their human, and therefore tragi-comical, affairs.

Here we must abandon the Barrie-Peter Pan equation, and recall what Barrie was himself. It is important to remember that he was born in 1860 at Kirriemuir, a remote Scottish village, and came from a very modest family; through the many events of a quiet but active life he has always remained a Scotchman. He was a novelist, poet and dramatist at an early age, and belonged to a group chiefly composed of young Scotchmen who were provincial realists, a little crepuscular, following the Scotch kailyard school of forty years ago. They were inspired by the little events in the small town among the mountains, by trifling affairs in poor farmyards; they adored nature, and flattered themselves they found a humanized aspect of it in the Highland shepherds. In *The Admirable Crichton* we find again this mystical sense of the goddess of nature translated directly into worldly terms. But the Scotch are

known in England for a certain dry, logical humour, a little desperate and prone to satire, and also, like all other Celts, by a hereditary inclination towards supernatural and magic fantasy, so rooted and spontaneous as to put to shame the English propensity, which is remarkable enough. The young Barrie showed very soon that he possessed these qualities, and, what is more, a special provincial sentimentalism of his own, in which can be found the humility of the man who is humbly born and is used to considering with admiration, not with envy, the great passions of the world, regarding them as things that, by reason of his humble origin, he can never attain. But these originally humble feelings become, when in contact with life, a clear and very intense consciousness of the supreme moral and sentimental values; and when in contact with men, even with successful and great men, and with their absurdities and troubles, they become a bitterness which does not condemn, but which never neglects an opportunity for defining and expressing itself. At this point an English and a Scotch temperament differ with no possibility of confusion. The English temperament is optimistic: good may follow evil, evil may be the cause of good; the English love of a possible alternative refuses to admit that there exist doors for ever barred, limits without hope, sentences without reprieve; it refuses to see the irrevocable destiny of a whole life sealed by an act or a gesture. The empiricism of the English spirit acts in such a way that it never attains those absolute idealizations of certain values, which life and the conduct of men so often and so easily humiliate and maltreat; and therefore it avoids that cynical bitterness into which disenchanted idealists easily and fatally fall.

The Scotch, in this regard, are more similar to the Celto-Latins, and Barrie sometimes seems like an Italian writer who has grown up in contact with the English, and has become accustomed to writing for them and drawing inspiration from them. Barrie's world, a little like that of Shaw but in a different sense, is the English world analysed by an un-English spirit; and the difference between the two must chiefly be explained by the fact that Barrie is much less *English* than Shaw. To understand this, it will be sufficient to observe how differently the two men feel one of the most essential and universal tragic motives—predestination. Shaw will not accept it; his basic Puritanism is always conquered and thrust away by a superficial optimism, not transcendental and a little romantic; nearly all his characters incline towards the good and often *become* good; society distorts and corrupts them, but as soon as they can break forth into a free life, and obey nature or their internal daemon, their individual God, they enter into a state of grace, and one feels that the author conceives a principle of redemption, even if it is directly materialistic and not transcendental. Sometimes he uses predestination in an ironical way, to show how easily society ruins or misleads the real nature of men: as, for example, in *The Devil's Disciple*, where the bandit reveals, when tried by circumstances, that he possesses the soul of an excellent evangelical minister, while the minister shows himself to be an excellent leader of rebels.

There is none of all this in Barrie; his idea of predestination might be that of the strictest Calvinism. He who has been a rogue will remain a rogue, he who was born a priest will die a priest, he who has sinned will sin, he who has

forgiven will forgive. Let us take for instance *Dear Brutus* (1917), in which Barrie's mature thought is expressed. Lob, a mysterious and intriguing little old man (perhaps a remote descendant of Puck of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*), entertains in his country house a mixed company of both sexes: there is a haughty lady of title who has never wished to lower herself to the middle-class compromise of marriage; a young lawyer who loses no opportunity of courting another girl under his wife's nose; an old gentleman who in his youth started a promising scientific career, but has passed the rest of his life in complete idleness; and finally a disheartened artist who has taken to drink, and his wife, who is irritated with him, and meditates leaving him and perhaps accepting the friendship of a rich patron. There is also Lob's butler, Matey, who from the first scene reveals himself as an accomplished knave. The guests and the odd owner of the house assemble in the drawing-room which looks out on the garden; it is full moon on Midsummer night. We have already been informed that every year, on this night, Lob has had guests, who have then gone out in search of an imaginary wood, which on this very night appears and disappears in the neighbourhood of the house. It is not known exactly what happens in this magic spot, but the guests have always returned changed, and sometimes they have not returned at all; it is rumoured that in the wood everyone finds a second chance in life. In fact, all weak-spirited characters who exclaim "Oh, if only I could live my life again!" find here at last a positive reply—"Here you are, now you can go back". At the end of the first act the windows facing the garden are opened, and in the magnificent moonlight we see, instead

of the garden, the enchanted wood. One after the other, sadly or timidly or joyfully, Lob's guests disappear into its mysterious depths; Matey, the butler, who does not want to go, is pushed out by his master.

In the second act we find ourselves in the wood, and see what use each character has made of his or her second chance. Matey, the dishonest servant, has become an equally dishonest big business man, and has married, of all people, the haughty lady of the first act. The old gentleman, instead of devoting himself to his noble studies, is pirouetting among the trees playing a whistle. The young lawyer, instead of marrying his wife, has married the girl he was making love to in the first act, and now follows his real wife, courting her desperately; one sees very clearly that his inevitable destiny is always to lose his head over another woman. The wife of Dearth, the artist, has joined the rich protector, who after a certain time has got rid of her, and now she goes about begging in the wood, ragged and hungry. Dearth, on the other hand, has a little daughter who accompanies him and cheers him by her charming pranks, while he paints the moonlight; he is evidently still a poor, unknown, and perhaps not very good artist, but in this fictitious and imaginary life he has managed to find something for which it is pleasant to struggle and make sacrifices. When, as the moon goes down, all these ghosts of humanity return irresistibly to Lob's house, the little girl, who really is a ghost, remains alone in the wood, calling for her father.

The third act, that of the reawakening, which would have perhaps been rendered tragic and bitter by an Italian or a German mind, is instead the most comic in the play;

Barrie seizes every humorous possibility from this passing from dreams to reality, from this subsequent return of all his characters from the second life to the first. The great adventure, however, has no effect on anyone except two people, Dearth and his wife, although for different reasons. The woman has seen the horror of those future projects which up to now she had cherished; Dearth has realized the existence of a hitherto unsuspected light in life. Only on account of these two will good old Lob be able to feel proud of his witchcraft. But not even they will have fully grasped the maxim which is the moral of the play, and which Shakespeare expressed thus—"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves. . . ."

This is the strictest Calvinistic predestination, brought up to date and expressed with much human sympathy and tenderness, and with fresh and sustained humour. Only in the episode of the painter and the imaginary little daughter, in the second act, there enters perhaps a tone of emotion, more personal than dramatic, which is frequent in Barrie when he brings children on to the stage, or portrays the joys of paternity, perhaps desired by him but never enjoyed in life. In any case it is interesting to see how here again Barrie's tenderness, which to many and also to me sometimes appears excessive and cloying, goes out to natural and elementary things or feelings, such as plants, flowers, birds, childhood and paternity. Thus *The Old Lady shows her Medals* (1917), a play which is dramatically imperfect, turns on the unsatisfied maternal feeling of a poor old woman who succeeds in persuading a brawny Scotch soldier, an orphan, to pass himself off as her son, and love her like a mother. *Quality Street* (1902), a delicate

"character comedy", set in the Napoleonic period, is all based on the feminine instinct for coquetry, on that sort of natural right which every woman has to be sometimes courted and flattered. The heroine, who has waited faithfully ten years for her lover who has been fighting in France, has meanwhile grown faded and older looking; when the captain returns, she realizes that she does not arouse his interest any more, and then, almost as if by enchantment, the coquette, hidden for so many years under the folds of a homely grey gown, reawakes in her; the captain, fascinated at once by this new apparition, which he believes to be an entirely different woman, ends by falling in love again with the real woman, now a little worn with sorrow and age.

Barrie sees no other predominating laws in the destiny of man but nature and predestination; and as nature chiefly inspires tenderness in him, and predestination humour, with a vein of mild irony, it can be easily understood that he never, or hardly ever, reaches the rocky peaks of fully developed tragedy. But sometimes, especially in his early works such as *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), his humour contains such open and honest satire, bound to events with such a strict necessity, that it is not even bitter or stinging. Crichton, Lord Loam's butler, who becomes king on the desert island, and turns into a butler again when Lord Loam and his family return to London, almost represents Barrie's human ideal: when in a state of nature he is a hero, and when in conditions of civil life a modest and obedient good fellow, one, in fact, who plays the game in all circumstances. The play appears to be a ruthless satire *à la* Rousseau on civilization, but in reality it is nothing

but a melancholy variation on the different conditions and laws which govern civilization and nature. Crichton, when he becomes a servant again in the third act, has something higher and more regal about him than he had in the second; for by his very courage of humility he shows himself to be the born superman.

As has already been said, Barrie is inclined to escape from the tragic laws of nature and fate through the loophole of fantasy. But when he abandons himself too much to this sentimental and epico-lyrical fantasy, he loses the precise and acute observation, and the witty imagination, which are the merits of his other works, and falls into a facile display of horrifying or syrupy inventions, which have a great effect on many young and old ladies in the audience, but leave the critic very doubtful. *Mary Rose* (1920) had a great success, and is not without merit; if, however, it is studied in cold blood, it appears somewhat artificial, and the dovetailing of Nordic legend and contemporary middle-class plot, even though intelligently done by Barrie, ends by being unconvincing. The escape into fantasy, which in *Peter Pan* or *Dear Brutus* is perfectly justified by a general epico-lyrical atmosphere, seems out of place and arbitrary in a story like that of *Mary Rose*, which should be purely dramatic.

Here, if only for the reason that some of his artistic and sentimental qualities have a vague resemblance to those of Barrie, we may recall the dramatic work of John Masefield, who has perhaps won greater fame through his novels and his poetry, becoming in fact Poet Laureate after Bridges' death. He also shows a general tendency to be a "lyrical-epic" writer, but from time to time, and

above all in his masterpiece, *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908), he is a pure and powerful dramatist. The scene is laid in the West Country, near the banks of the Severn, which is occasionally flooded by the bore; this forms the natural background to the drama, adding a vague, half-heard accompaniment to the events. The action takes place in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the central figure is Nan, a young country girl whose father has been hanged under the accusation of having stolen a sheep. Poor and deserted, she is taken in by her uncle, Mr. Pargetter, a weak, thick-headed rustic, tyrannized by his wife who hates the intruder. If Nan is a purely Anglo-Saxon figure, Mrs. Pargetter might be an evil old witch from one of Verga's plays; it is she who poisons the girl's life, creating around her an atmosphere of tragic moral solitude. When Nan falls in love with Dick Gurvil, who seems to return her affection, it is Mrs. Pargetter again who trades on the fear and greediness of the petty country libertine, and persuades him to become engaged to her own daughter. In the third act we learn that Nan's father has been proved innocent, a fact which Nan never doubted, and the law, as was then the custom, pays her a sum in reparation, which in her circumstances is a considerable amount. She now becomes a suitable match, and Dick Gurvil, who really had no feeling for Miss Pargetter, an insipid and spiteful creature, returns to Nan. But she, now mad with exasperation and disgust, murders him and escapes; and we know that she is going to throw herself into the flooded river. She has already spoken of this, in the strongest scene of the play, with the old Gaffer, a fiddler and story-teller, a little mad and something of a poet, who is her only

friend and confidant. The roaring river, filled with the tidal wave, and Gaffer's strange comments and digressions, give the whole of the third act a dreamy and tragic tone, as if human sorrow and the travails of nature were fused into one material and ideal fatality. This is an artistic atmosphere similar to that in Synge's dramas, in which the realism, brought into touch with the great elementary facts of nature, suddenly becomes *classical* and serious, so that reality no longer appears solely as drama, because it is humanly felt with a calm and vast despair; and the last residue of our emotion is lyrical, but of a perfect form of lyricism, in which the epic and dramatic elements which meet there fuse together without losing their original vigour. This fusing of three forms or elements into one, which gives the tone and final artistic value to the work, is common to all perfect, even if not very great, works of art, and *The Tragedy of Nan* belongs to this category.

Masefield has written many other dramatic works for which he more clearly deserves a place in this chapter, beside Barrie. *Melloney Holtspur* (1923) is his purest and most remarkable lyrical-fantastical drama; it is the story of two tragic loves, one between the heroine and the unfaithful Lonny, both living only in the world of the spirits of the dead, the other between two mortals, Lenda and Bunny. In the middle of the play we return to the past, Melloney and Lonny descend to the earth from the world of spirits, and Lenda, under the friendly influence of Melloney, goes through her adventure again. This recalls Pirandello's *Six Characters*, but the atmosphere is quite different: here we are right in England, and this transcendentalism is at heart rosy, hopeful, optimistic and

empirical; it echoes the spread of spiritualistic practices and beliefs of the English post-war period, and tends to useful and pleasant results. The technical ability and delicacy with which the author develops his difficult structure are admirable; there are many fine, vivid, dramatic and lyrical moments; but the whole play is not strong and vital enough. Having said this, I will pass over Masefield's two or three domestic dramas, which are not very striking, and his other fantasies and theatrical visions, which are fairly similar, in type and tone, to the one which has just been mentioned.

This kindly and gifted author, so fertile in different fields such as drama, the novel and poetry, is, perhaps, by the very variety of his work, which in its extremely different forms has always a well-defined spiritual nature, the most genuine and direct representative of the best type of intellectual *gentleman* of the first quarter of this century. In this sense those who chose him to be Poet Laureate made a very happy choice: his personality does not stand out too much, precisely because he stands out as a type. The English gentleman of the early twentieth century was optimistic, well-off, cultured, active, sentimental at heart and often outwardly a humorist, a man of the world, mystical yet inclining towards empiricism, but capable also of epic or quasi-epical infatuations, of lyrical transports and tragic sensibility; this fine product of the late flowering of the British middle classes, now declining under the weight of too many different and adverse circumstances, finds in the work and in the figure of Masefield a continual representation, and I should say also *satisfaction*. Masefield's limitations consist also in this fact, that he

is too homely a figure, and answers too much to the characteristics of a common personality; and some English critics, who prefer him as a dramatist to Barrie, forget the wider and more intimate inventive vigour of the latter's work, all created from nothing, as it seems, to express the unmistakeable whims of an unmistakeable personality. Even if Barrie has not written a perfect work like *The Tragedy of Nan*, one can say of every page of his, even the worst, "This is Barrie". As an artistic figure he stands out clear-cut and precise, wholly *created*, whereas Masefield, not only in drama, has in most cases brought to perfection a common *type*.

Other novelists and poets attempted drama, or at any rate works of a dramatic type. Thus one may recall, although they are no longer performed, the few dramas and romantic-historical comedies written by Stevenson in collaboration with W. E. Henley, or adapted by others from Stevenson's novels, such as the horrifying *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. *The Dynasts* (in three parts, 1904–8) by Thomas Hardy, with its nineteen acts divided into 130 scenes, and with hundreds of characters, mostly historical (the action centres round the Napoleonic war), in parts imaginative or purely mythical and symbolical, has never been performed in full; in fact its famous author only intended it for "mental performance". It has been said elsewhere that the custom of writing dramas to be read only was already widespread in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when there was a wider gap between the mentality of the authors and the theatrical tastes of the public; but these writers always had the idea

that a public more accustomed to the drama would have been able to appreciate their works, so that stage conditions were not wholly lost from view. *The Dynasts*, in the author's own intentions, remains quite outside even this category of semi-dramatical works, although Granville Barker produced a stage version of it, which was given in 1914. Neither can Hardy's *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (1923), a pleasant variation on the Arthurian theme of Iseult, be said to be essentially dramatic. We can also pass over Conrad's two or three novels and short stories which have been adapted for the stage, but whose original artistic purpose was not theatrical, nor perhaps dramatic in the real sense of the word. Of Robert Bridges' two works of a dramatic type, *The Return of Ulysses* and *Demeter*, a masque in verse, it will be sufficient to observe that their internal motive is not dramatic, but essentially lyrical, like all the work of this unprolific and modest author, who always gained the admiration and esteem of cultivated people, and yet never attained in any sense a real popularity. His poetry is all reflective, and is never born from will, or the crude and instant sorrow of reality.

I will speak of William Butler Yeats here, and not in the next chapter dedicated to the Irish theatre, for reasons which, when explained, will perhaps help us to understand his work, to some extent. Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865, and came of a Protestant family of English origin; he is thus one of those many Anglo-Irishmen who, uniting in themselves in different ways the characteristics of the two nations, have so often and so forcefully contributed to the military, civil and literary history of both countries. After

studying in Dublin, Yeats settled himself in London in 1887, but without losing contact with Ireland; in some ways, although so young, he helped to maintain the cultural ties between the two countries, although politically he always favoured the moderate view of Irish Home Rule which now for more than ten years has become a reality, and a reality destined to endure. A dreamer, yet not lacking in enthusiasm or practical capability, Yeats was one of those poets who have a leaning towards mysticism on one side and towards oratory on the other, one of those conscious or unconscious romantics who find in art not only a mission in life, but also a conception of what life should be. During his youth Yeats was a sort of preacher of a mystical-aesthetical ideal; he found himself very out of place amidst the somewhat narrow and prudish hedonism of the Victorian world, and the sparkling but vicious gaiety of the 'nineties; he could not share, except for love of what was clever and new, the crude realism of certain Ibsenites, nor, on the other hand, could he fully conciliate the laboured primitivism of the Pre-Raphaelites and Rossettians with his experience of Ireland, that is, of a country where primitive conditions of life exist in reality, as well as in the imaginations of writers, and where this patriarchal reality is expressed in a very ancient, legendary oral literature. In Yeats the dreamy imagination of the ancient Celt is joined to an optimistic impulse to action, which is essentially Anglo-Saxon. A mystic and idealist in the most familiar sense of these terms, he liked also to see himself as a hero of the ideal, and almost as a reformer or aesthetic guider of a society. He believed in poetry as it was possible to believe in it at the end of the nineteenth

century in England: in a poetry which might redeem the human soul from the dull dreariness and moral inanity of industrial and town conditions, like a magic and miraculous power. But because of the almost physical difficulty of bringing pure poetry to the masses, and because of the fact that the theatre, on the contrary, however corrupt and unpoetical he then found it to be, still formed a direct link between the souls of the enlightened and inspired and the people, Yeats turned his thoughts towards the drama. Destiny made him come in contact with the Ibsenites, the realists and the revolutionaries who were the *avant-garde* of the time; but he wanted plays that would be "remote, spiritual and ideal"; he believed in "the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic" . . . in "the evocation of spirits" . . . in "the power of creating magical illusions"; that "our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself", and that "this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols" (*Essays*, p. 33).

The concepts, therefore, on which Yeats based his dramatic work at the beginning of this century were a philosophical, vaguely spiritualistic, love of Nature, and symbolism in art—a symbolism not to be confused with the French symbolism which was then spreading, and which saw in the symbol an intellectual force; Yeats' symbol was an objective bond between a mystical Nature and a mystical ego. These were very different concepts from those which prevailed in the Independent Theatre in London, to which Yeats first allied himself, and from which in a certain sense was derived, through the work of Yeats, Lady Gregory and others, the first "Irish Literary

Theatre", in 1899, the germ of the future Irish National Theatre. Yeats was among the directors of this theatre for some years, and his plays were performed there. But he did not create a school or a group; even if other young writers wrote lyrical dramas imitating him, these were not accepted. The Irish Theatre, like every theatre (I would add, like every great artistic event), was born for a practical and historical reason: in it the cultivated classes of the new Ireland wanted to see themselves, to consecrate themselves and to rediscover their country in its deep, actual reality, and express, and hence affirm, this reality before their own eyes and those of others. Parallel to this historical need, and interwoven with it, was the widespread, typically post-romantic tendency, shared by so many countries, to indulge in popular and local realism—that realism whose development we have already attempted to trace in England, and which we shall find again, with characteristic aspects, when we deal with Irish drama. Yeats, although he wholly agreed in politics with the moderate Irish patriots, was in his inspiration quite estranged from the two principal causes, mentioned above, of the birth and development of the Irish Theatre; the magic symbolism of words and verse, of which he made a kind of militant religion, was nothing but an episode in that spiritual revolt of the industrial middle classes against themselves, of which this volume comes to be the history, from a particular point of view. And in Ireland there were, one may say, neither middle classes, in the modern and Protestant sense, nor industrialism with all its derivatives. Yeats was therefore an excellent Irish citizen (he was one of the first senators elected by the Free State), and one of the

best English poets who flourished in between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; he confused money-making with artistic realism (which was, on the contrary, a reaction against it), and sought salvation in a kind of *pure poetry* applied to drama, on Irish themes, for an Irish public. Ireland admired him, and was grateful for all his noble efforts; but his dramatic work remained sterile whether as a model or a stimulus, besides being little suited to the theatre, and therefore imperfect as a work of art. In contrast to Synge, who is yet similar to him in some respects, but who, on account of the originality of his inspiration, was one of the creators of modern Irish drama, Yeats belongs almost entirely to the history of English literary thought.

The Countess Cathleen (1892, performed 1899) was the first work with which Yeats attempted to try out all his powers in the drama. It is a pure rhapsody on the motive of mystical love, based on a legendary theme well known in Ireland, but not exclusively, nor perhaps originally, Irish. Two demons disguised as merchants wander through Ireland in a time of famine, and buy souls for money; the pious Countess Cathleen, finding it impossible to redeem these souls with all her worldly goods, offers in exchange for them the sacrifice of her eternal salvation. The demons accept the pact, as her soul alone is worth much more than all the others. In the last scene Cathleen, dying, is harrowed by the enormity of the sacrifice she has made, but after her death an angelic vision reveals that she is saved, because ". . . the Light of Lights—Looks always on the motive, not the deed"; and Aleel, the mystical lover of the Countess, expresses in song the sorrow of loss and the

glorious assumption. Here the epic mood applied to an imaginative theme is clearly shown; the situations and the figures of Aleel and the dying Cathleen would be tragic, if the interior, poetical-mystical motive did not prevail in such a way as to remove every real contrast, giving the value of poetic symbolism, with a tinge of rhetoric, to a theme which contains great dramatic possibilities.

The Hour-Glass is Yeats' most purely lyrical and speculative work, and therefore, not by chance, one of his best, if not the best. It is an old popular legend briefly adapted for the stage in a form which recalls the medieval morality plays. All the characters are symbolical: the Wise Man, who represents reason; the Fool, who represents instinct, or the mysterious "memory" or "will" of Nature; the disciples, who passively follow the Wise Man's teaching; and the Angel, who is revelation, the mystical messenger. The Wise Man has taught that the "invisible World" does not exist, but now, preparing one of the texts for his scholars, he comes across a passage which seems to contradict his doctrine, and remains confused. The Angel appears, and tells him that before the sand has fallen in the hour-glass he must find one who still has faith; only thus, after having passed through the flames of Purgatory, can he be saved. The Wise Man interrogates his disciples one by one, but they only repeat his ideas, and echo his negative teaching. He then turns to the Fool, who is the pure, ingenuous *idiot* (in the Greek sense), who has always been utterly impervious to his intellectual elaborations; the Fool confesses his faith, and the Wise Man is saved. This is the original prose version performed in 1903, which follows exactly the old legend; but in 1912 Yeats

produced a new version, in prose and verse (this continual unsatisfied returning to old works is one of his characteristics), in which the Fool, wholly occupied in banal and material things, does not trouble to reply to the Wise Man's question, who has therefore to bow down to God's will and his own eternal ruin. This second version is a more carefully written and polished work, and when it was performed with scenery and costumes designed by Craig, it was an extremely significant and successful production. But the old popular *morality* of the first version was much truer, and really more dramatic, because it is the eternal destiny of Wise Men to have to learn the sacred and fundamental truths from Fools; in the second version this truth is further intellectualized, to the loss of the inward dramatic value of the popular story; the Fool does not speak because too many casual, trifling things distract him, and the Wise Man is damned. It is superfluous to point out how the whole idea has a romantic flavour, and how Yeats' modification contains, besides, a realistic element.

There is not space here to linger over Yeats' other principal works, which after all belong more or less to the same class as the two already mentioned. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), a one-act play in verse, personifies Ireland as a poor, barefoot old woman, who goes round asking her sons to sacrifice themselves for her; and it had an immense success. *The Pot of Broth* (1902) is a popular realistic farce, of the type that Lady Gregory wrote. *The King's Threshold* (1903) is a dramatic fable in verse, pointing out the importance of the poet in the public life of the nation. *The Shadowy Waters* (1904) is a pure poetical fantasy; *On*

Baile's Strand (1904), *Deirdre* (1906) and *The Golden Helmet* (1908) are all legendary, imaginative and speculative; *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894, revised in 1911) is nothing but a lyrical thought dramatized by symbols; and *The Player Queen* (1919) is a symbolical farce, not very effective. After this all that has appeared in print is *Four Plays for Dancers*, graceful scenes for amateurs, and various translations. One of the proofs of the lyrical quality, and small dramatic value, of Yeats' drama is in the fact that nearly all his works gain by being read rather than seen; but even when read they express a mentality and a sensibility which our taste no longer appreciates: they belong too much to a fixed time and atmosphere, they date in fact, except for some passages of pure lyrical-imaginative thought, which could be taken from the context and collected in an anthology.

James Elroy Flecker also dates, but his period is nearer to ours; perhaps because, not without some shame, we must recognize in him a less ingenuous and enthusiastic, and more *decadent* Romantic than Yeats: it is these defects, and some of his qualities, which bring him nearer to us. He died very young in 1915, and left behind him a *Don Juan* which is interesting as one among the thousand attempts which have been made to re-interpret in a modern, and in this case fantastical, way the figure of the great seducer; but he is known to the public through *Hassan*, which was published posthumously in 1922, and has since been performed with great success. Hassan is a fat, greasy confectioner of Bagdad, to whom fate has given the gift of poetry. He falls in love with a beautiful woman, in whom he discovers a harlot's soul, and as he lies in the

street stunned by this discovery, the Caliph, who roams about at night disguised, in search of adventure, finds that he is left with Hassan as companion instead of the court poet, who has preferred to slink off. The two fall prisoners to the "King of the Beggars", who at that moment is organizing a rebellion against the Caliph, but manage to free themselves by a clever suggestion of Hassan's. The latter now becomes powerful and lives in the palace, favoured by the Caliph. Rafi, the leader of the beggars, and his betrothed, Pervaneh, are put to death after horrible torture; and Hassan, disgusted at all the cruel and inhuman things he has seen from his golden cage at court, escapes with the aulic poet, and becoming once more a humble pilgrim, leaves for Samarkand. The style and tone of the prose dialogue, the songs and the stage directions are built up with unusual ability; the magic of the East is cleverly exploited without becoming cheap; the general atmosphere comes down from the "Parnassiens", or more exactly, it is a branch of Romantic decadence, of which Flaubert's *Salammbô* is perhaps the archetype. A fabulous element, however, appears from time to time, which is not at all *oriental* in the accepted sense, especially in the last scene at the palace, where, after the torture of the two victims, their souls pass into the air and speak to each other, and the fountain in the garden speaks too, because it contains the soul of the sculptor who was killed so that he should never make anything equally beautiful. The figure of Hassan is remarkable, with his sweet spirit which sings and dreams within his fat, awkward body; the others are a little stiff and stylized, and the traces of symbolism scattered about the play do not add to its dramatic value.

Some of the love songs and battle songs are good, and are perhaps the best and freshest part of the whole work. From this it may be concluded that *Hassan* deserved neither the furious praise it was accorded by some nor the severe criticism of others.

From Flecker we pass, without too wide a gap, to another post-Romantic, who answers to the long name of Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, eighteenth Baron Dunsany. Born of an Anglo-Irish family, an officer in the Boer and the Great War, a traveller, and a wild-game hunter in Africa, Dunsany feels poetry as a need and drama as a mission; in this he resembles Yeats, but his mentality and taste are very different, and in some respects more modern. In order to have his own theatre close at hand, which yet should be a manifestation of art rising from among the people, he formed an amateur dramatic company among the villagers of Kent (where his old manor was), which has performed his own and other works, sometimes with a certain originality of interpretation; and before the creation of the Irish Free State, he also contributed to the Irish National Theatre, later breaking off his connection in order to give a visible sign of his British loyalty. An aristocrat by birth and conviction, he feels he must exercise his duties as such even in art, and in some of his plays, as we shall see, the aristocratic function has simply become a thesis; but this "function of command" expressed and upheld by a nobleman in works of artistic intention leaves one a little suspicious and puzzled: the function of the commander is shown and fulfilled in the act of commanding. To posture as the living, nay more, as the speaking image of this function seems to savour of snobbery, all the more

in an Irish nobleman, since Irish nobility, like Italian nobility, was imported and has hardly ever failed to associate with the idea of difference of caste a vague hereditary sense of racial difference as well, and thus has never become entirely fused and mingled with the minds, motives and needs of the people whose aristocracy it was to be.

Let us examine *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior* (1911), a play in two acts. Argimenes is a slave to King Darniak, and he and his companions would die of hunger if it were not for their frenzied search in the waste land round the city for bones which are still juicy. During this search Argimenes unearths a buried sword, which is both real and symbolical, and as he was born a king, the refinding of the instrument of his old power brings back the power itself. He puts himself at the head of the slaves, assaults the armoury, overcomes and kills Darniak, and causes to be built, on the site of his past misery, a temple to the unknown warrior who had lost the sword, the new idol that everyone in the kingdom, both humble and powerful, shall worship. The symbology is clear: this is a Yeats half a generation younger, of noble blood and tastes, who has read the works of Nietzsche. The background is oriental, but the symbol which inspires the work comes from a decadent Romantic European philosophy, a complacent doctrine which Dunsany, I should say, interprets complacently for his own use—he who is born noble will always be noble, destined to command the born slaves, who will be slaves eternally.

This, as can be seen, is another form of the idea of predestination, but its treatment and colouring is very different from Barrie's, because Dunsany has a cynical sense of

humanity, and a despairing idea of life: humanity seems to him such a poor thing that circumstances can always lead it to the strangest, most exalting or humiliating, transformations. For example, in the above-mentioned play, when Argimenes, after he has become a king again, hears of a dead dog which is to be thrown to the poor wretches outside the walls, the instinctive memory of his endless hunger and of the patient searching for bones to pick proves too strong for him, and he rises from the throne crying "Bones!" Dunsany treats his idea of predestination in a wider and more deliberate way in the most successful of his plays, *If* (1921), which is the story of an ordinary London citizen, John Beal, leading an ordinary, obscure and peaceful life; one day, however, something happened which for him was extraordinary—he missed the train up to London from the country. We now see an imaginary past life of John Beal, and are presented with a whole series of lively events which could very well have taken place *if* he had not missed the train. It will suffice to say that he becomes king of a strange tribe in the heart of Persia. If it is remembered that Barrie's *Dear Brutus* was written in 1917, the conclusion, suggested by many critics, that Dunsany wanted to oppose his own philosophy of predestination and character to that of the Scotchman, seems almost inevitable; he shows to the utmost the part which circumstances play in the life of man, and presents man, although possessing a *predestined* character, as a puppet in the hands of fate.

Dunsany's mind is chiefly occupied with fatality, chance, the relativity of human destinies, the inconsistency of conventional and moral laws, the predomination of men

born powerful and predestined to command, and the absurdity of human effort to give established, convenient forms to the perpetual and tragic flow of destiny and life. This recalls some Italian writers, such as Pirandello, Chiarelli, Antonelli and Bontempelli, whose works, like those of Dunsany, found some popularity after the war, not only in their own country. Dunsany was particularly appreciated in America, where the Little Theatre made known some of his hair-raising one-act plays (*A Night at an Inn* is the most characteristic and best known: an Indian idol comes to life to pursue those who robbed it of its gem, and strangles them one by one), and also some of his longer works. But in America, as on the Continent, the post-war period was one of great, widespread and dramatic spiritual uncertainty, which for the most part the insular British escaped, at least in its particular forms at that time. Dunsany never won real popularity either in England or in Dublin, yet some of his plays, both long and short, are colourful, effective on the stage, and present opportunities for good acting, even if they are not inspired by a wholly dramatic daemon, for too often there is a thesis which points a moral through the drama, instead of a drama which *meets*, so to speak, with a thesis. Other plays which may be mentioned are *The Glittering Gate* (1909, in one act), *The Gods of the Mountain* (1911), *The Queen's Enemies* (1916, in one act), and finally *The Tents of the Arabs* (1920, in two acts), which is the mildest and most human of them all, and almost the only one where the idyllic plays a part; here Dunsany's haughty and harsh irony seems to be mollified in a nostalgic feeling for the solitude of the desert.

An exile in his own country, Dunsany corresponds, however, to a phase of taste and feeling which the most cultured audiences in Europe and America went through; but his form of writing has had few imitators on the English stage. This does not mean that the typical epico-lyrical imagination of the English has ceased to seek for dramatic expression. The war gave fresh impulse to spiritualistic inquiry, and the wave of economic, social and moral depression which followed it seems also to have accentuated the interest of many people in this sort of speculation about the beyond, the nature and destiny of souls, and individual immortality. This is a passing phenomenon of no great importance, not destined, perhaps, to leave much trace in English thought and life, but it has inspired a few dramatists to write some plays characteristic of it. The best is Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*, which a few years ago had a great success, both on the stage and on the screen. The action takes place on a boat which appears to be real, inhabited by people who appear to be alive; instead it is Charon's boat modernized. It has a fine cocktail bar, where the barman, a sad, obliging character, has also departed this life, and is condemned to this employment in order to expiate his suicide. Among the other characters there emerge a dishonest business man, condemned perhaps for ever to be dishonest; a frivolous worldly lady, who will also remain such, but amidst conditions which will make her faults seem to her disagreeable and dreary; a young drunkard, and his mother, a humble woman who has made great sacrifices so that he should receive a gentleman's education, and who has remained anonymous to spare him being ashamed of his low birth; this couple

will remain bound together for eternity, the mother happy in being able to serve her son, who will, perhaps, always be ignorant of the fact that his mother is with him. In the last act, when the other shore is reached, all the voyagers have gradually realized that they are dead, and now a jovial clergyman jumps on board and decides their fate. The act is rendered more dramatic by the presence of two lovers who have tried to commit suicide on account of their love, and are between life and death; but at the end their treasured little dog saves them from asphyxia by barking and jumping through the window-pane, and they return to the world of the living.

Vane has cleverly used, as can be seen, many simple ingredients; he follows closely the idea that after death our faults will meet with appropriate punishments, modernizing it; he creates, for an act and a half, a gripping and magical atmosphere of suspense, before the audience have really understood what it is all about; and when they have understood, they are now so interested in the characters that they follow the play attentively to the end. But where is the drama? The drama is presupposed and imagined, rather than acted; it is the life which these people have already lived, and their slow and difficult realization of the fact that they are dead. Here also an almost Calvinistic conception of predestination dominates, founded on the character as it has developed during life; this is a tragic conception in itself, but not tragically (in fact if anything comically, here and there) expressed in the play, although Vane is inclined to regard it slightly like the Catholic Purgatory. After Barrie and Dunsany, Vane has brought nothing new to drama except his modernistic conception

of death and the beyond. Later, in view of the success of this play, he attempted a fantasy about pre-natal existence, called *Overture*, but this time fortune did not smile on him.

One could give a list of more recent psychic plays of this kind, such as Frank Harvey's *The Last Enemy* (1930), but they are hardly worth treating at any length.

History, when it supplies speculative and imaginative *subjects*, and not simply opportunities for dramatic inspiration, leads to works which should not strictly come within the scope of this book. But the *impurity* of all art, as I have mentioned before, in regard to those necessary distinctions which we trace in the abstract, leads to the fact that even such works, which are prevailingly non-dramatic, often contain a very strong dramatic element. In any case, they have a bearing on the history of drama, and give evidence of widespread and characteristic tastes and tendencies. Then the English, who in painting have always favoured the portrait, and who in recent times, beginning with Strachey, have started the now too popular fashion for novelized biographies, find themselves very often quite at home in this form of composition; not only the authors, but the public, who like to see on the stage the much loved or detested characters of the history books, and take an enormous interest in the private lives of great men. History, then, furnishes material to satisfy all tastes; and from the various uses which the drama makes of it in different epochs one can retrace a very clear and illuminating picture of the change of ideas and tendencies in a given society. Those who make this research with regard to English drama from the nineteenth century up to our

own day will see, I think, three great periods outline themselves, each dominated by distinctive characteristics which are common to the whole dramatic output, from the heights of the famous poets who very often write only to be read, down to the depths of crude melodrama intended for suburban pits. In the first long period, which stretches without a break till 1880, history is really nothing but a jumble shop; the writer goes in and serves himself according to his needs. Landor, Swinburne and Tennyson use it with varied art and sometimes with social and controversial intentions; Boucicault, and his fortunate successor Harold W. Whitebread, exploit it cleverly, extracting situations and characters which will easily excite the enthusiasm and hate of the masses. In fact history is a pretext to display on the stage feelings and characteristics particularly dear to the author's heart, or to public taste.

The second period, which lasts approximately from 1880 till the Great War, is dominated by Ibsen, realism and the sense of actuality, and during this time history, as a fount of dramatic inspiration, passes into the background. The writers who now turn to history are those who do not see the necessity for treating modern problems in drama, and they go there for the most part with lyrical intentions, and more to search out lyrical symbols than dramatic motives. Thus Laurence Binyon, for example, in his tragedies in verse, *Arthur*, *Attila* and *Boadicea*, has simply collected subjects for compositions that are all interior, subjective, reflective and imaginative, from history or legend; characters and situations only serve him for lyrical reflection, and now and then he reveals himself as that very remarkable lyrical poet whom the English justly

admire, chiefly in respect of other works. When Binyon has recourse to the purely mythical, as in *Paris and Oenone*, he finds himself in a world which is much closer and more similar to that of his genuine inspiration, on account of the immediate and spontaneous symbolical value of the material, and the play, apart from dramatic values, has a more fluent and harmonious tone. All these works, however, are much more adapted for "mental performance" than for the test of the footlights.

Of much less importance, but belonging also to this period, and more or less to this type of work, are the little historical plays and comedies such as M. F. Wadmore's *The Moving Finger*, and the historical one-act plays of Constance D'Arcy Mackay, who also wrote numerous masques. More remarkable than the latter, and more inclined towards legend than history, is Lascelles Abercrombie, who gained a certain fame with *Deborah* (1913). He then specialized in a type of allusive and symbolical drama, with rustic characters and background, rather resembling a dramatized parable. In this class are *The Adder* (1913), *The End of the World* (1914), *The Staircase* (1920), *The Deserter* (1922) and above all *Phoenix*, which has an imaginary Greek environment. Abercrombie is a minor Yeats, nearer to our time in taste and motives, more dramatic than Yeats, but a much less powerful lyric writer.

Laurence Housman, with his varied and notable work, seems to mark the passage between two periods and two groups of authors, and maintain a certain bond between them. One of his most successful works was the fantastic *Prunella* (1904), written in collaboration with Granville

Barker; but long before this he had experimented with his most characteristic form of writing, that is, little historical, imaginative or mystical one-act plays. *Possession* (*A Peepshow in Paradise*) (1922) reveals a Paradise inhabited by common middle-class characters who still retain their earthly passions, virtues and weaknesses, and thus taste for ever the joy of goodness inwardly attained, and suffer eternally for weaknesses not overcome. This, as can be seen, is not a new theme, and was later taken up by Vane and others; but perhaps Housman was the first to treat it in this way, that is, by reproducing a little Victorian middle-class scene, and gradually letting us realize that the characters have passed from earthly life, and that we are seeing a symbolical representation of eternity. Here, as in the already mentioned works of Vane, Frank Harvey and others, and, in another way, as in Housman's own *Little Plays of St. Francis*, there is a note of sympathetic and human optimism with regard to the eternal problems of the soul and the beyond, which perhaps vaguely reflects the sufferings of the war, and the impulse of humility of a people who, after having ruled for a long time with wisdom, power and wealth, now feel that the very roots of their prosperous life are menaced, and project into eternity, in a rather melancholy way, that which to-day they seem to lack in life. It is like passing from the spirit of the Old Testament to that of the New; Calvinism, and the Puritan mentality derived from it, are finally abandoned; the word *love* acquires a deeper significance, and the word *forgiveness* reappears with a meaning which would horrify all the old pioneers of the Reformation.

But with all this we are still a long way from the total elimination of all those naturalistic, psycho-analytic and other determinisms which are the modern descendants of Calvinistic predestination and the transcendental fatalism of the Reformation, although far removed from them; we are still a long way from conceiving *evil* as the Catholic conceives it, that is, as something inherent in our spiritual nature, and not as something psycho-physical. In the modern middle classes, especially among the English, the transcendental and moral fatalism of the Reformation transformed itself into that superficial or imaginative and empirical optimism, always seeking possible alternatives, of which much has already been said; but it was the *Weltanschauung* of a people who felt themselves young and on whom fortune smiled. Now the thought of *evil* returns, together with that of eternity as a difficult, distant thing to conquer; the need of the mysteries of forgiveness and redemption begins to be felt again. Perhaps this humanity becomes less proud, but more understanding and loving and profound; the devils of Housman's little Franciscan scenes anticipate those of Lawrence and Joyce, which are harsh, contradictory and agitated; even they indicate, however, the need of returning to genuine sensuality, uncorrupted instincts and that full, immediate, and at heart humble, *feeling* of life which among the Latin peoples has never entirely been lost.

This is really a digression, and has taken us away from the significance and intrinsic value of Housman's scenes, such as *The Comments of Juniper* and the other *Little Plays of St. Francis*, of which a new collection came out in 1932. They are modest and charming pieces, taken mostly from

the "Little Flowers", which express all the genuine goodness and frank mysticism of a transparent Anglo-Saxon soul; but there is a "literary" element in them, an attempt to suggest speculative and symbolical senses which the simplicity of the original legend does not admit, which thus impoverishes, on the whole, the simpler and wider human meaning. As art they have an epical value, like all art which springs from a genuine mystical and ascetical inspiration. The scenes from *Angels and Ministers* are also epical, in other ways and for other reasons. Here Housman, anticipating Strachey and a taste which was later to find wide expression in the drama and the novel, tried to portray, with little pictures of intimate life, the essential reality of the great Victorian figures—the Queen herself, Disraeli, Gladstone, Parnell, Chamberlain, the young Balfour and many minor characters. Here also the art is not dramatic, but representative and reflective, like that of the novel; the author tries to "dislyricize" himself as much as possible, to enter into the elementary and fundamental motives of characters who really existed, and to reconstruct them in his imagination; from an initial contemplative and reflective attitude, which is lyrical, he goes back, through the drama of these existences, to the original, epical sources of their inward life; he reverses the ordinary process inherent in life, which passes from the epical to the dramatic, and from there to imagination and thought, or the lyrical. The resulting work is not essentially dramatic, but has a value of its own, both artistic and historical; and it is quite possible that true history can only be written thus.

Housman was therefore in some way a herald of that new tendency towards historical drama which began to

show itself after the war, and which has already produced notable examples. It is another sign, perhaps, of the reflective, and somewhat melancholy, attitude of a people who have recently had a great past, and now feel a new epoch coming on, entailing restrictions and sacrifices, in which everyone must secretly prepare themselves for the toil of building a new world. The recent British civilization, which we have termed *middle class*, using the words with reference to a particular time and place, slowly lowers, with weariness and anger, its once proud and glorious colours; and consoles itself for the present by reviving, sometimes with a little amiable cynicism, or with an apparent coldness which hides admiration or regret, the figures and scenes of a past still recent and *heroic*.

John Drinkwater takes this line, but in him there is no trace yet of cynicism or coldness. He is like a link between a Tennyson, let us say, and a Strachey. Indeed his first dramatic works, *Rebellion* (1914), *The Storm* (1915), *The God of Quiet* (1916) and *X = O: a Night of the Trojan War* (1917), are still, essentially and as a whole, lyrical thoughts and imaginative ideas expressed in dramatic form, in prose or in verse. In *Rebellion* there is a poet who rebels against the tyrant and is in love with the Queen; round the skeleton of this slightly fictitious tragic theme the author weaves speculative and lyrical situations and variations, of which some are very beautiful. Perhaps the most striking, or at least the most characteristic, of these first works is *X = O: a Night of the Trojan War*; in a few rapid scenes we are shown two couples of young soldiers, one in the Greek camp, the other on the walls of the besieged city; they are young friends who read poetry or sing love songs, and even

thus briefly treated they are four pleasant, lively characters. Simultaneously one of the two Trojans, and one of the two Greeks, leave for the enemy's camp in order to try, under cover of night, to take some enemy soldier unawares and kill him; and it falls out that each of the two encounters and kills the friend of the other, and finds, on returning, his own friend killed. This is all that happens: the short play was written in 1917, the most tragic year of the Great War, and expresses a state of mind which was then very common. The blank verse, with a very free and broken rhythm, and the echo of the ancient epic poem which seems to hang over the action, give a solemn, melancholy charm to this little work; it has a lyrical, but not exactly a dramatic, power of suggestion. The interior drama of "having to kill" is hardly hinted at; the play is wholly constructed, *à rebours*, from its contemplative, lyrically sad conclusion about the ultimate vanity, and the innate moral error, of these slaughters of which human history seems yet to have so much need.

After the war, Drinkwater dedicated himself to writing historical-anecdotic plays based on the reconstruction of a central character. *Abraham Lincoln* came out in 1918 and had a great success, both in England and America; *Mary Stuart* appeared in 1921 (revised in 1922); there follow *Oliver Cromwell* (1922), *Robert E. Lee* (1923) and *Robert Burns*; and also some charming one-act plays such as *The Making of Ryknield Street*, in verse, which also has a historical subject, re-evoking the Roman conquest of England. When Drinkwater reconstructs the figure of one of his heroes, such as Cromwell, or Lincoln, he tries to identify himself with the *epic* central motive of the

character, and then to express it in a few detached scenes, striking although anecdotic, which somewhat resemble Housman's one-act plays. Once Drinkwater has grasped the *leit-motiv* of his hero, he sings variations of it through the three or four acts, as if reciting a prayer, or chanting and repeating a war song. In Cromwell, or in Lincoln, he sees above all the ethical and social dominating passion, the moral nucleus of an individual who forces himself into the history of his people, dominates it for a time, and stamps it with his own impression. There is nothing of that subtle, tragi-comical analysis of famous characters, studied also in their weaknesses, and by their unconfessed and unconfessable motives—a method of which Rovani's *Giovinezza di Giulio Cesare* had shown the possibilities and which in recent times, following Freud and psycho-analysis, has had some good, some less good, and some very bad results. Drinkwater is direct, confident and enthusiastic; he shares in the passions he portrays, and shares in them as a man, not only as an artist: his dramatic art is essentially epic, and his epic thinly veils a rhetoric, even in *Mary Stuart*, where he has attempted a new analysis of a much debated and difficult character, long dear to all romantic poets and dramatists, both old and new. He regards the unhappy Queen of Scotland chiefly from the sentimental point of view, and analyses her numerous loves; but the word "analyse" is out of place here; in reality Drinkwater is a generous lover of Mary Stuart, a distant lover in time, and therefore only capable of generosity. Mary Stuart is treated as a woman of too lofty feelings, and of too varied and delicate a soul, for a single man to be the hero of her dreams or to satisfy her thirst

for the ideal lover—not a bad idea, but true of all dreams, both men's and women's.

Perhaps the public are tired of real drama, or incapable, to-day, of dramatic emotion; and these plays based on anecdotes lead them by a straight path, where no obstacles exist for those who have read their history books. The tendency has been in the air for some time, and now there is no season in the year in which at least two or three London theatres do not produce historical-anecdotic dramas or comedies. *The Rose without a Thorn*, by Clifford Bax, is a successful example. The author, still young, has in his short and intense career as a dramatist produced various works of some consequence, sometimes in verse, ranging from *The Poetasters of Ispahan*, an ironical fantasy with an oriental subject, to *Mr. Pepys*, an opera-ballet, and from *Socrates* (1930), a prose play in six scenes which utilizes the great Platonic legend and ends with a sort of slightly modernized transcription of the *Phaedo*, to the three charming *Polite Satires* in rhymed verse. Bax seems to be torn between his facility for poetry and a very remarkable grasp of stage technique (a gift shared by many of the latest dramatists); the former would take him back to the "lyrical drama" of the style of thirty years ago, while the latter induces him to prefer historical and anecdotic plots, better adapted to the stage. Perhaps his principal defect is not yet to have found in himself a *corpus* of artistic motives sufficiently genuine and profound to suggest to him a more important work.

Ashley Dukes, a fine historical novelist, had his novel *The Patriot*, which dealt with the assassination of the Emperor Paul I of Russia, dramatized by Alfred Neumann

under the title of *Such Men are Dangerous* (1931)—a subtly ironical play which had a success. But Dukes has also attempted drama himself, always on historical or imaginative themes which recall the first early Romanticism (such as *The Fountain Head* and *The Song of Drums*, taken from De Coster's legend of *Til Ulenspiegel*) but which are treated in a light, detached, quite modern way by an analytical mind. His best comedy is certainly *The Man with a Load of Mischief*. A famous singer has run away from her lover, an eighteenth-century Prince of Wales, and one of the Prince's noblemen, accompanied by his valet, follows her, catches up with her at an inn, and tries to persuade her to return; but the valet, who amidst this corrupted court nobility seems to personify the new people, bringers of a new civilization, loves the singer, declares his love, which is requited, and elopes with her under the very nose of the Prince, who at this moment appears on the scene. The whole affair takes place in a country inn; and the local colour, the rather forced oddness of some of the characters, and the underlying historical and moral sense are fused together and conveyed with an unimpeachable technique and rare good taste; and, having said this, it would perhaps be bad taste on my part to enter into a too minute examination of the play from the artistic standpoint.

A similar ability and shrewdness are found in Rudolph Besier, who in *Don* (1909) and *Lady Patricia* (1911) showed that he possessed to a remarkable degree the gifts of realistic observation and gay, bizarre imagination; no other drama of his appeared for several years, but in 1930 he produced *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, which had an endless run. It treats of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and

her father's household, her meeting with Robert Browning, and their elopement. A striking and typical interpretation is given of the father's character, a Puritan obsessed by the remains of erotic impulses, a Freudian neurotic whose complexes influence in an almost tragic way his conduct towards his sons and daughters. Anyone who has some knowledge of modern tendencies, especially in the northern countries, and of the widespread, anti-Puritan, *romantic* craze for Freud, will partly understand why this play was successful; it is not a work of art in the highest sense, or dramatically artistic, but it is scrupulously composed and elaborated with much study and technical ability.

To close this chapter we will mention one other prolific writer, Reginald Berkeley. His very successful "comedy of manners", *French Leave*, was inspired by the war, as was also the dramatic parable *The White Château*, intended as an anti-war play. He must be mentioned here chiefly for his very successful play *The Lady with a Lamp* (1929), which is a cleverly staged, if not exactly dramatic, reconstruction of the strange, and in some ways almost legendary, figure of Florence Nightingale. In *The World's End* and in *Machines* (1930) Berkeley (who, if my information is correct, is a young Australian lawyer whom the war brought to England, where he discovered his vocation as a dramatist) has tried to give complex visions, both dramatic and imaginative, of modern European society, its errors, and its possible impending catastrophes. *Machines* has the sub-title of "symphony of modern life", and was originally written to be broadcast: it is a satire, based on the fundamental conception, certainly not new, that modern society mechanizes, and by mechanizing destroys, the

individual and his fundamental values. There are machines everywhere, and not only in factories, but in the law, in journalism, in social conventions and so on. This is a theme and a state of mind of which we have already seen many manifestations in that dramatic realism which, a last product of the Romantic movement, turned round to criticize and fight, on its own ground, modern Nordic middle-class civilization, which among all civilizations was the most characteristically *romantic*.

VI

IN IRELAND

The beginnings of the Irish National Theatre · Lady Gregory and the humorists · Synge, Martyn · The Irish realists · The new realism; Sean O'Casey

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the Home Rule movement in Ireland at the end of the last century there came an awakening of interest in native folk-lore, the Gaelic language and local literary traditions. Provincial realism, which just at that time was spreading all over Europe, helped to swell that current of feeling which sprang from so many historical, political, religious and psychological causes; and the writers gave their slight but very powerful contribution towards the rising effort of the islanders of Erin to become once more a nation and acquire self-government. It was nothing but an episode in that general phenomenon which at the end of the Great War developed itself even beyond the limits of common sense, namely, the establishment and affirmation of small nationalities, and the interest in folk-lore and the stirring of local intellectual activity which were implicated in it.

In Ireland in 1893 we find the Gaelic League being founded by a little group of native scholars and poets; soon afterwards the Irish Literary Society sprang up, which in the years 1899 and 1900 was represented by a periodical, *Beltaine*. On May 8th, 1899, George Moore was

able to attend the first performance, in a Dublin concert hall, of the new-born Irish Literary Theatre, which gave Yeats' *Countess Cathleen*. The rehearsals had been held in London, with a half-English cast; it was a slender beginning but successful; there was a whole public composed of artists, intellectuals, more or less rebellious and discontented Irish patriots, and "irregulars", who felt at home in the environment of this new theatre, just as a similar audience, across St. George's Channel, had felt itself in perfect agreement with the ideas and aspirations of the Independent Theatre in London. It was to some extent this London experiment which kindled the enthusiasm of Yeats, Lady Gregory, Moore, Edward Martyn and the other founders of the Irish Theatre movement, and aroused in them a spirit of emulation. The interior motives which they more or less admitted were patriotism, a streak of rebellious spirit, the desire to find a full outlet for their personal creative capacity, and a lively, youthful enthusiasm which gave warmth and colour to the enterprise, presenting it as an apostolate of a new civilization among a very ancient people humiliated by misery and servitude. These were electrifying motives, causing minds which differed strongly to merge in one common enterprise. There was Yeats, a pure Irishman but a Protestant, of talented parents, and mixed education, who had come to maturity in the climate of London, and under the influence of foreign literature, especially French—a poetical mystic, a symbolist, and a rhetorician in the best sense of the word; there was Lady Gregory, who came of an Anglo-Irish, Protestant and Unionist family, was the wife of the governor of Ceylon, and had lived for many years in the

centre of London's intellectual and fashionable society; and there was Edward Martyn, an Anglo-Irish country gentleman and a practising Catholic, very studious, mystical and in his own way an idealist, but in another way also a realist, of that particular form of realism which may be said to be inherent in Catholic tradition. Finally there was George Moore, also of an Anglo-Irish and Catholic family, whose education had been untrammelled and largely self-acquired and who had lived for a long time in Paris under the influence of the symbolists—a very sincere, crude, bold and yet also elegant writer, with a sceptical and rather cynical mind, who held that art was a personal way of re-thinking life from beginning to end.

In this heterogeneous group it was naturally the woman, Lady Gregory, who bound the enterprise together, and helped its practical ambitions to be realized. It was chiefly due to her that in April 1902 the Irish Literary Theatre was able to employ a permanent, all-Irish company and transform itself into the Irish National Theatre, with a wider programme and higher ambitions. The performances had also begun to attract the interest of the popular public, and from time to time they were given at the Gaiety Theatre; later the National Theatre was transferred to the Abbey Theatre, where it still remains, an institution recognized, subsidized and controlled by the Free State. From 1903 to 1910 the enterprise was subsidized by Miss Horniman, the great pioneer of independent provincial theatres all over Great Britain, but in 1911 it turned into a regular company, and as such it exists now, having had Lady Gregory among its directors up to her death (Yeats retired some time ago). Other enterprises have sprung up round

the National Theatre, such as the flourishing Gaelic Drama League, also subsidized by the Free State, and after the war there was for some time a Dublin Drama League, which produced several very modern works, not all Irish.

Lady Gregory is thus a central figure, and the popular success of the National Theatre, since its beginnings, are largely due to the comic and realistic effectiveness of her little comedies, as well as to her administrative powers. *Spreading the News* (1903), for example, shows how a little incident, due to a misunderstanding between deaf and rather stupid people, becomes, with the exaggeration of the rumour which spreads from mouth to mouth, a terrific event leading to police intervention, disturbance among the people, and very nearly to bloodshed; because rumour excites people's minds, arouses dormant passions, and returns to those who unintentionally started it in such a form that they do not recognize it, and believe themselves heroes or victims of an affair which has never taken place. All this happens in a remote little Irish town on market day; the characters are only lightly sketched in, but the local colour is boldly rendered, and the whole may be considered as a happy study of a particular group psychology. Certain critics, who have only found here "a comic situation", are, in my humble opinion, wrong; for otherwise all comedy which tends towards farce would be nothing but "situations", and farce is, on the contrary, among all types of comic drama, the one in which a tragic element, fate, enters most directly. Here, fate is not only the deafness of one character or the foolishness of another; it is really the prompt and disorderly reaction of a whole multitude to the spreading of news, which, in other

surroundings, would only provoke doubt and laughter. There is a similar tragi-comical element in *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), which treats of the continual jealousies and disputes between two poor, exhausted, weak old men, who have neighbouring beds in the ward; here fate, although it seems a paradoxical comparison, is the same Leopardi deplores in his *Palinodia*, *Ginestra* and many other poems: it is the infinite weakness of humanity which yet, to strengthen itself and to give an illusory object to life, drives the weak against the weak, the unhappy against the unhappy. It is not that Lady Gregory intends to communicate this thought to us, but she has keenly felt it in the little play, which also expresses and throws into relief a psychological characteristic very common among the Irish people.

Lady Gregory wrote in all thirty-one dramatic works, mostly in one act, and here we must limit ourselves to what has been said above, only recalling in passing the *Irish Folk History Plays* (1912), which are legends taken from the people and dramatized in the Kiltartan dialect, not wholly dissimilar from that which Synge used and partly transformed. Among these *Grania*, in three acts, is the best: it is the legendary story of a girl who escapes from her betrothed, an elderly and respected hero, with a young man, Diarmuid, who has, however, sworn to be loyal to her betrothed. He does not touch her, therefore, although they wander in the forests for seven years, until circumstances compel them to live together for a week in the same shelter. When the betrothed arrives, Diarmuid, overcome by remorse, and not being able to show how long his effort at loyalty had lasted, flees and is killed in battle, while Grania settles down to remake her own life

by the old hero's side. There is, in this play, a trace of feministic theorizing: Grania is the woman who wants to obey her own affections, even if by doing so she destroys the standards and principles of honour and loyalty which men establish between themselves for reasons which women cannot understand. When one reflects that in all three acts there are only three characters, and that nevertheless the action is fully developed and has dramatic vigour, one realizes what mastery of technique this talented writer attained.

Lady Gregory's most characteristic works are, however, her humorous, farcical or, as we have said, tragi-comical little comedies. In these plays she helped to reveal the Irish to themselves; she freed the drama from those conventional comic types, almost like masks, with which Ireland had also supplied the popular English stage, and she presented characters and situations drawn with very clear intuition from the life of the masses. Irish patriotism, which is very susceptible, and was especially so in these very agitated years at the beginning of the century, did not resent this form of humour, which sprang from a deep sympathy, and which aimed, not so much at rebuking corrupt habits (which after all did not exist on the island), as at making the Irish conscious of the defects and weaknesses most common in the national character; it was in fact also a contribution, indirect but valuable, towards the struggle for a free nation.

Various comic writers followed Lady Gregory's example. In 1908 the Abbey Theatre presented two comedies by W. F. Casey, *The Suburban Groove* and *The Man who Missed the Tide*, in which there is much pleasant, realistic

irony on the ingenuousness and snobbery of the lower middle classes living in the suburbs of Dublin. The former, in particular, is a satire on the anglomania, shown in their language and manners, which was very common among Dubliners—a theme of obvious political interest which contributed to the lasting success of the play. William Boyle wrote a great number of comic works and had a wider success, but in some ways his plays are rather a continuation of the old farcical comedy with stock types, such as that which Boucicault successfully produced a generation earlier. In *The Building Fund* (1905), for example, the central figure is a miserly old woman who succeeds in eluding the designing attentions of two young prospective heirs, and on her death it is found that she has managed to make a will depriving them of inheritance. In *The Eloquent Dempsey* (1906) the hero is an astute, shady provincial character in Ireland, who has a finger in every pie and always wants to be the first to serve, but more especially to exploit, all parties. *Family Failing* (1912) and *Nic* (1916) portray situations which require more delicate handling, but they do not attain the coarse farcical effectiveness of the two former comedies. Boyle also attempted "serious" and "problematic" realism in *The Mineral Workers* (1906), which shows the many obstacles which certain prospectors have to overcome in order to develop the mineral resources of a district, such as the hostility of the peasants and the primitive surroundings; finally the enterprise is successful, and the play ends on an ironical and humorous note.

A younger writer, George Shiels, who has passed part of his life in America, and is a very productive writer although for many years he has been confined by illness, after a few

little one-act comedies, wrote *Paul Twyning* (1922), portraying a type of astute, lucky strolling workman who is still a very popular, and almost proverbial, figure in Ireland. He is perhaps the only living figure which Shiels has brought on to the stage, although even he is more of a caricature than a character; but the comedy, like the most successful of the author's subsequent works, *Professor Tim* (1925) and *Kevney* (1927), relies above all on the plot and on the stage tricks of the old comic repertory. Finally we must mention George Birmingham's big, simple, immensely popular Irish farce, *General John Regan*: it rather resembles Gogol's *Government Inspector* adapted to Irish psychology and environment, except for the fact that the deceiver is a benefactor, who, returning to his native village from America, wants to rouse it from its torpor, and promptly invents a distinguished General Regan, who, having left the village poor and unknown many years ago, has become the national hero of some South American Republic. Celebrations are planned, a statue is ordered, the authorities are assembled, and everything would end in semi-tragedy if the "inspector-benefactor" did not appear on the scene of action at the right moment, armed with sufficient cheques to placate all minds. The atmosphere of this comic-realistic Irish drama in one respect recalls a little that of the Sicilian comedies, and in another seems to be much more strictly connected with the Russians. Is this due to literary influence, or to some affinity in the human raw material which has supplied all these literatures with subject-matter? Perhaps it is due to both reasons; it must not be forgotten that the Abbey Theatre made many modern Russian writers known to the Dublin public while

they were still unknown in London. The artistic value of these comic works is, however, scanty, except for some of Lady Gregory's comedies, and the works of Synge, which are comic in a particular sense of their own.

Synge was born in the county of Dublin in 1871, studied and obtained his degree at Dublin, and departed for the Continent, attended by youth, poverty and his talent, which was trying to find itself. He lived for some time in Paris in a miserable students' lodging in the Latin Quarter; he read classical, English, French, Italian and Spanish poets, wrote a little poetry, very clearly stamped with his personality, and reviewed English and French literature for a few small reviews. He was a fragile, delicate creature, a mixture of wildness and refinement, of the dreamer and the court poet. Yeats lived in the same building and got to know him there in 1899; he knew his man and made him realize that in Paris he would never be anything but a writer without inspiration, among many others, and a second-rate critic. He persuaded him to return to Ireland, in fact to the most Irish part of Ireland, the Aran islands, off the east coast opposite the Bay of Galway. They are inhabited by a rough, ancient race of fishermen and very poor peasants, who still speak an almost Elizabethan English, and preserve the spirit and customs of many centuries past. Synge was to study these people, making himself their equal; here was a rich source of inspiration. Synge went, and at first had serious difficulty in gaining the confidence of these islanders; but finally he was able to enter the intimacy of their houses, absorb the spirit of their language, and penetrate their simple psychology,

which could be rendered in a few rough and austere strokes. In October 1903 the Abbey Theatre performed his one-act play *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and in 1904 another one-act play which is a masterpiece, *Riders to the Sea*; *The Well of the Saints* came in 1905 and *The Playboy of the Western World* in January 1907. He then wrote *The Tinker's Wedding*, which was never performed, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which was performed posthumously in 1910, and to which the author was unable to give the final retouches, which always cost him much labour. Synge also published, shortly before his death in March 1909, a book, *The Aran Islands*, which has been widely read and which narrates at length the author's experiences in these forgotten islands.

Let us observe the bare, crude themes chosen by Synge. In *The Shadow of the Glen* an old miser feigns death in order to catch out his young wife, at least in her intentions; there arrive a vagabond and a peasant of the neighbourhood, and the latter without more ado proposes to Nora, the girl; they count the money which the old man has left, and are discussing the future, when the pretended dead man springs up from the bed in a rage and chases the woman out of his house; she goes off with the vagabond (at this point part of the Dublin public hissed, not being able to countenance an Irish adulteress on the stage). *Riders to the Sea* simply tells of the successive disappearance of two young peasants, swallowed up by the sea; the women at home recount how they have seen their ghosts galloping on the rocks. *The Well of the Saints* is the only work by Synge which may be described as a "morality", and contains a supernatural element: two old, blind beggars, a man and a woman, take the ironical remarks of

their neighbours literally, and imagine that they are the two most beautiful creatures living; but a saint passes by and gives them back their sight; thus all their illusions are sadly shattered, and they beg to become blind again. *The Playboy of the Western World* was also received with many protests by its first Irish audiences; it was taken for a satire on the national character, and at the first hearing it gave much offence; only later was its value perceived, and in general the Irish of to-day have largely learnt from their theatre not to have too high an opinion of themselves. The story of the play is well known: Christy Mahon, in an outburst of rebellion against his tyrannical father, has struck him with a spade, leaving him for dead, and has escaped; he reaches a remote inn in Mayo, and when, little by little, his feat is made known, he is exalted as a hero by the rough peasants, and starts a love affair with Pegeen, the daughter of the inn-keeper. At last the father arrives, wounded and anxious for revenge; now Christy only appears as a vulgar little schemer, and they tie him up to hand him over to the law; even Pegeen disowns him. But he makes a supreme effort and frees himself from his bonds, assaults his father again and reduces him to a state of obedience, and goes off, now sure of himself, and in his own way an expert in worldly matters. So he will go from country to country, from fair to fair, a proud, self-possessed vagabond, a buffoon and a poet, skilful with hand and tongue, followed by his father as if by a servant. Pegeen, converted once more to admiration, sees him depart with infinite melancholy. This is Synge's masterpiece, and we must speak of it again.

The Tinkers' Wedding is wholly comic; it is a great

coarse Elizabethan farce, with a vein of modern popular realism. It treats of two vagabonds of different sex who have agreed with a priest to give him a certain recompense if he will marry them; but the priest, when it comes to the point, finds nothing but empty bottles, and curses them freely; they retaliate, tie the poor priest in a sack and threaten to throw him in a boghole. It is needless to add that it has never been possible to perform this play in Ireland.

Deirdre of the Sorrows takes up the same legendary theme which has been treated by so many other Irishmen, but Synge does not romanticize it or exalt it to a dream, neither does he idealize the characters into symbols; here the primitive, crude, lowly character of the legend is maintained, with its popular and poetical element. It is a story of love, jealousy and death, and Synge also manages to insert another tragic element which is easily grasped by the audience—the sense of growing old, and of that living death which is old age.

Those who make a careful study of Synge's works will find that his secret is the same as that of Verga in the *Malavoglia* or in the *Rusticane*: his popular realism becomes poetry, yet remains realistic. He rediscovers, in an age of refinement and in a world of intellectuals who have all more or less absorbed something of the old reformed Puritan atmosphere which is their environment, the secret of primitive passions, of great and elementary errors, of those primordial heroisms which rise to the height of myths. The Aran islands are the furthest spot of this western part of Ireland, the poorest and most cheerless, where Cromwell allowed the Irish Catholics who were

fleeing from his persecutions to take refuge; he left them this rainy and rocky wilderness as the "only alternative to hell". These people settled themselves there and drew their livelihood from the sea and almost from the bare stones; it is a region in which, as the proverb says, the harvest is reaped with a knife. Material conditions, the distance from any centre of civilization, and the conservative tenacity of people who felt themselves exiled and unjustly persecuted, caused very ancient primitive customs and mentality to be preserved in these counties, especially in these small islands, and also a kind of English dialect which recalls that of the people of the Elizabethan period, a rough but solemn, passionate, dense, vaguely rhythmical speech, which is almost sung. Synge has neither reproduced nor paraphrased this dialect; he has only made ample use of it in order to forge a language of his own, in many ways personal and exclusive, poetical and realistic at the same time; and so effective and attractive that Irish prose writers and dramatists, after they have heard it, always find it very difficult to forget, and have often slavishly imitated it, perhaps in good faith thinking to mitate thus the authentic language of the inhabitants of West Ireland, when on the contrary they were only submitting to Synge's influence and copying his style.

It was chiefly this brilliant poetical *invention* of a special language which allowed Synge to solve an intricate artistic problem, rising from his poetical nature, from his tastes and inclinations, from his already chosen material, and from his practical intentions: it was a question of making a very crude, elementary and realistically rustic material express also that mystical-imaginative streak which is in

every Irish heart; it was a question of raising to the height of a real poetical drama even the lowest, most disagreeable and shameful realities of Irish life and character. The solution of all these problems was purely *poetical*, that is, reached through the creation of a means of expression, and therefore a technique, which was wholly new and *ad hoc*. *The Playboy*, whether read or heard in the original, is a clear proof of this: it is a satire, but at the same time it is a dispassionate realistic picture of characteristics which are common among the Irish people, and to some extent among all peoples. At the same time it is an idyll, which ends in a dramatic and ironical way: Pegeen is at heart the common being, man or woman, who is incapable of perfect love, and lets himself or herself be dragged along, in admiration as in contempt, by the cries of others and by momentary fame. Here also, like all modern writers, Synge is a lucid sentimentalist; but his bitterness reaches a definite, conclusive seriousness; he does not, like so many Romantics, play on the theme of disillusion, but looks it in the face, and describes it in precise terms; he is a Classic. Finally, *The Playboy* is also an epic song; it is the hymn, swelling in tone as the play advances, of the liberation of the hero, of his rise from low, obscure servitude to full freedom and dominion over himself; and even if this happens through a crime, the work, luckily for its own sake, has nothing in common with Nietzsche, or D'Annunzio, or other similar romantic exalters of crime. Christy's bungled parricide is in tone with the figure of the father, with the tragically primitive general atmosphere of the surroundings, and is almost, I should say, ***beneath*** a moral valuation. These are, briefly and as I see them, the merits

of this uncommon work, which is certainly the best the Irish theatre has produced, and one of the best plays of our century; and although I pointed out its merits, almost dividing them into categories, this does not prevent the play from being a perfect artistic whole, blended by a constant and harmonious poetical strain. Its dramatic limitations reveal themselves rather in the fact that it exercises a greater charm when read than when performed, from which one can conclude that *The Playboy*, like all Synge's work, contains many poetical qualities which are not exactly dramatic.

This defect, if it is a defect, is common to nearly all the early writers of the Irish drama, not indeed to Lady Gregory, but to Yeats, Moore, Edward Martyn and George W. Russell ("A. E."), who at the beginnings of this drama, in 1902, wrote a remarkable *Deirdre*, which was, however, much less bold and less crudely primitive than Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Edward Martyn, born in Galway, in the west of Ireland, in 1859, was educated at Oxford and London, and travelled widely on the Continent; he was a man with broad human interests, occupied with many problems, and although he never entirely neglected the drama, for which he had a lasting passion, he never dedicated himself to it with that exclusive abandon which is generally the sign of a superior vocation. In 1890 he published a sort of novel, *Morgante the Lesser*, where the devil of Pulci, in a curious reincarnation, examines the England of that time and satirizes it in a very compelling and biting way. Martyn contributed to the first efforts of the founders of the Irish National Theatre with plays and sometimes money, as he was the richest of the company;

from time to time he founded little experimental theatres, such as the Irish Theatre of 1914, which performed his works, and also attempted to make his countrymen appreciate the rarer and more heterodox products of foreign drama. On the whole, with all his shrewdness, idealistic sincerity of intentions, and fervid activity displayed in so many directions, he remained in every field a well-meaning dilettante. As a dramatist Martyn is the strictest Ibsenite of the Irish, and, one might add, the most Irish of the Ibsenites. Let us pass over *The Tale of a Town*, which, after long and hazardous negotiations, was not performed till 1905, and take *The Heather Field* (1899). Tyrrell, a landowner in Ireland, is a dreamer whom circumstances compel to fulfil a practical function; he brings his dreamy idealism into his work, plunging himself into a sea of misfortunes which lead to his ruin, and at the end it is only in madness that he finds a means to evade the lessons of reality. His dream is to reclaim a large tract of heather land situated on his estate: he throws himself into the enterprise with the characteristic abandon of all idealists who, dazzled by the beauty of the goal they wish to attain, forget the problem of the means of attaining it. His wife tries to have him certified as insane, and only the intervention of an intimate friend, Ussher, prevents this humiliation from being inflicted on him. Then fate intervenes, in the form of creditors, who force Tyrrell to become a landlord harsh and tyrannical towards his tenants and a proprietor loathed by his dependants, like so many others described in history and literature. His personal safety has to be guaranteed by an escort of armed police; this is the final humiliation for the idealist, more serious even than the attempts to have

him certified; he shuts himself up in the house to ruminate on his magnificent and unrealizable projects, and his already latent madness explodes in a violent form.

One is easily reminded of Ibsen and Strindberg; the heather field which is to be reclaimed is a vague symbol of Ireland, just as Tyrrell represents her sons, dreamy, generous, extravagant and impractical. One cannot say that his drama expounds a thesis, yet it springs from the meeting of a general, abstract conception, that is, the necessity of heroes and madmen for the improvement of the world, with an immediate feeling of sadness, that of the vainness of the efforts of all those who dreamed of a rapid improvement in the conditions in Ireland. Here also, as often in Scandinavian, and sometimes Russian, works, the woman represents the practical element, the opportunist common sense which does not understand rash deeds and audacities. The play is thus at the core ideological, although it does not set out to uphold a precise argument; we are in the atmosphere of Ibsen, and on the brink of that provincial realism which at this time was beginning to develop both in England and Ireland. *The Heather Field* is without doubt a very remarkable artistic and dramatic work, but is not among those which easily acquire a lasting and universal meaning.

Martyn's subsequent work does not greatly increase his importance. *Meave* (a psychological play in two acts, 1900) is a dramatized dream and belongs to the common atmosphere of "Celtic Twilight". *An Enchanted Sea*, *the Place-hunters*, *Grangecolman* (1912) and *The Dream Physician* (1914) incline towards the realistic and satirical; but Martyn had an incorrigibly passionate nature, and lacked the calm

mind necessary for realism, and the detachment necessary for satire, especially when dealing with his native country. He saw Ireland become free and master of her own destiny before his death in 1924; and although the new state of affairs must have caused him much anxiety and apprehension, it was probably the greatest satisfaction of his life.

Irish realism soon took on a special characteristic of bitter violence, at first in the drama and later in fiction, and in this guise it crossed the ocean and influenced the younger generation in America; sometimes through a direct affinity of race and instincts, as in the case of O'Neill, and in other cases through an affinity of situation: the Irish realist rebellion against the hedonistic and Puritanical British rule found a parallel in the revolt of many young American intellectuals against "Babbittism", the industrial dictatorships, crass materialism and inborn Quakerism of the old and new America. The creation of the Free State, and the long rebellion which preceded it, seem to have given these Irish writers the sense of an immediate social, and almost historical, function; and either for this or for other reasons, they remained for the most part faithful to their country, whether it was a question of material for their inspiration, or of the practical aims which an artist never fails to have with regard to his work. As always occurs in such cases, the creation of the Free State and the beginnings of its régime were a disappointment to some of the younger and more inflamed spirits, who then forced their realism to the controversial aggressiveness of O'Casey in the drama, and of Liam O'Flaherty and others in the novel. The Americans, on the other hand, being unable to rebel against

the monstrous, crushing reality of their country such as it was becoming with the natural development of its resources, or to cherish any hope of influencing or changing such a formidable process, gradually emigrated, and came to Europe to create a "free American literature". This is a very interesting case of voluntary literary exile, with which the notable names of Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos and various others are associated; but, except for the last-mentioned writer, dramatists hardly ever took part in the movement.

Padraic Colum was one of the missionaries who aroused a taste and feeling for the new Irish drama in America. Born in central Ireland in 1881, he was first employed in Dublin, and wrote some plays for the National Theatre. After a youthful piece, *The Kingdom of the Young* (1902), he wrote *The Broken Soil* (1903), which in the definitive edition of 1907 is called *The Fiddler's House*. This is a drama of environment and character, of a realism into which a little of Synge's poetical magic seems to have penetrated. The central figure is the peasant violinist, Conn Hourican, who, in spite of his daughter Maire's efforts and reproaches, ends by being captured again by the longing to roam about the land from fair to fair, where he will find admirers and a variety of experiences; and the daughter, renouncing a love affair, finally gives in to the old man's wishes and goes a-wandering with him. Conn is again a character, so to speak, who is more lyrical and symbolical than realistic and dramatic; nevertheless he, like the other figures, and the general tone of the environment, stands out in very sharp relief, especially in the first two acts. *The Land* (1905) is more realistic, and more

directly inspired by a social problem. It deals with two old men who have toiled all their life to acquire the land which they cultivate; one of them has even gone to prison. Of their families, diminished by death and emigration, only four remain, consisting of two engaged couples, the one composed of a young man and a girl who are strong and venturesome, the other of two incapable and almost mentally deficient characters. The former couple, lured by the distant and false glamour of life in the big American towns, emigrate; the second couple remain, and it is they who will inherit the land so hardly won. It is a comedy, as can be seen, with a tragical background, both on account of the situation in itself and because this family event represents one of the greatest calamities of Irish life during the last sixty years or so—the process of selection at the wrong end, and the emigration of all the strongest and best elements of the population. *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) is a tragedy of low middle-class life in a little country town in central Ireland, and has something of the atmosphere of *The Fiddler's House*.

This was the last work written by Colum for the Irish theatre, because in 1910, like the tragi-comical characters in *The Land*, he emigrated to America, where he is well known as a journalist and author of children's books, and where he has certainly helped, through personal contacts and through his activities as critic and publicist, to diffuse interest in the new drama, both provincial and realistic, and in general that sense of art and of life of which all the Irish literature of this century is an expression. In the history of Irish drama he is the first to find the happy medium between the rather external or farcical realism of

Lady Gregory and the lyrical realism of Synge; he brings real figures, situations and language on to the stage, with nothing archaic, rhythmical, suggestive or solemn about them. It is from the *choice* of these real figures, situations and conversations, furnished by experience and memory, that the drama springs. He thus makes a step forward on the path of regional and rural dramatic realism, and opens up new possibilities which many writers made use of after him with relative ease.

We must limit ourselves here to speaking only of a few of these many dramatists, and must just mention their works rather than attempt to discuss them, in order not to afflict the reader with an interminable series of summaries of plays resembling each other. Although the realities of life are so numerous and changeable that nothing seems to give a better image of infinity, it is nevertheless true that when art develops any particular manner of describing what is real, it seems that also the reality described is affected by the monotony of the form; and then the infinite human situations and passions draw themselves up into regiments, and finally seem to resemble each other like so many tin soldiers. This is not wholly the case in the Irish realistic drama, but it would appear so to the reader if too long a list of briefly resumed plays were given.

George Fitzmaurice, much less well known than he deserves, must be mentioned for his comedy *The Country Dressmaker* (1907), in which there is a girl character who slightly recalls the classical Madame Bovary: she imagines that an ancient admirer who has gone to America is working furiously for her sake, in order to bring her happiness again one day, and thinks of him as a hero from a romantic

novelette, devoted to her only. When the hero returns, on the contrary, it is quite clear that he has never even remembered the girl; this, however, does not prevent the comedy from ending happily. *The Pie-Dish* (1908), in one act, *The Magic Glasses* (1913) and *The Dandy Dolls* incline towards the symbolical and imaginative. *The Moonlighter* (1914, never performed), in four acts, describes scenes and turmoils of Irish political life; and *'Twixt the Giltenans and the Carmodys* (1923) is a rather farcical comedy, but full of character and atmosphere.

Seumas O'Kelly, also a native of West Ireland like so many of these writers, belonged to a group which violently opposed the Abbey Theatre after the production of Synge's *Playboy*, but, reconciling himself later with the National Theatre, he had his principal works performed there. He died very young in 1919. His best play is *The Shuiler's Child*, performed for the first time in 1909. Moll Woods, a vagrant beggar, discovers that a couple called O'Hea have adopted from the workhouse her little son, whom she was forced to abandon so that he should not die of want with her. An inspector comes to take the child back to the workhouse, because old Mrs. O'Hea is accused of not bringing him up with proper discipline. The beggar woman, who has seen with what affection this couple treat her son, presents herself at the workhouse, reveals that she is the boy's mother and claims her son, who, according to the law, is restored to her. She then simply takes him back to the O'Heas' house and leaves him there, although with great sorrow. But this time the law is against her; the boy will remain with his adopted parents, but she goes off to be charged with child-desertion. This is a social problem,

as can be seen, and a very moving drama, which has a sure effect on the audience; O'Kelly escapes the danger of banal success by his accurate realistic study of the characters, especially the protagonist. *The Bribe* (1913) is a study of the social and political problem, very acute in Ireland, of nepotism in public offices. *The Parnellite* (1917) is a crude, tragic satire on Irish political life, arising from the scandal which caused Parnell's fall and his disappearance, at least from public life. O'Kelly has also written some little one-act comedies, which are not outstanding. Ibsen's influence can be felt in him more than in others of his group, and his artistic personality is fairly similar to that of Colum in *The Land.*

J. Bernard MacCarthy is a postal official in a small Irish country district, and at the same time an author of novels, short stories, dramas and comedies. This is not surprising, because Ireland, like Italy, rarely enables her authors to live solely by their writing, and nearly all the writers who have been, or will be, mentioned have had professions or received incomes independent of literature. In *Crusaders* (1917) MacCarthy presents the case of a young priest who is leading a temperance campaign; but when he reaches the district where his parents keep a public-house (it being not unusual in Ireland for the sons of inn-keepers and similar people to enter the Church) he realizes that his campaign would bring material and moral ruin to his family. The young crusader abandons his committee, and from the window sees his listeners, who now scorn and deride him, crowd into the public-houses. The one-act tragedy *The Sea Call* (1917, not performed) and *The Long Road to Garranbraher* (1923) are also worthy of note. MacCarthy is a

scrupulous writer, very honest and not too original. A more lively writer is Seumas O'Brien, who made himself known in 1913 with *Duty*, a very successful farce, which is a satire on the old Irish police, a little in the style of Lady Gregory. He then emigrated to America, where he was successful with other comedies and short sensational plays, always in one act and on popular Irish subjects, such as *The Black Bottle*, *The Cobbler's Den* and *Magnanimity*.

Lennox Robinson is another leading figure in the history of Irish drama, having worked for it for over twenty years as author, director, producer, critic and even actor. He was born in 1886 near Cork, and his father was a Church of Ireland clergyman; Robinson, therefore, was also Anglo-Irish. Largely self-taught, he began very soon to write all kinds of things, and his vocation for drama only revealed itself when he was about twenty years old, when for the first time he saw a performance at the Abbey Theatre: soon afterwards he took a story written by his sister and turned it into a one-act play, *The Clancy Name*, which he sent to the Abbey Theatre and which was immediately performed, in 1908. It is the story of a proud and solemn Mrs. Clancy, who unexpectedly learns that her son has killed a man in a quarrel, and now, tormented by remorse, wants to give himself up to the authorities. The tragedy in Mrs. Clancy's soul springs chiefly from the horror of the thought that the Clancy name will be for ever disgraced; this theme contains a hidden satire on the clan spirit which is still so strong to-day in certain ancient Irish and Scottish districts. A lucky incident, however, saves the Clancy name; the murderer dies in an aura of heroism while trying to stop a runaway horse. It is evident,

in this as in his successive works, that Robinson does not mind employing such obvious dramatic stratagems, or the public's seeing their impossibility; he has realistical-satirical intentions, and wants to bring out clearly certain psychological characteristics common in the world he describes, and certain moral errors which are derived from them. This can be seen in *The Cross Roads* (1909), and more still in his other drama of rural life, *Harvest* (1910). In this play we see how the Hurleys, a family of farmers, through having received a town education not adapted or suited to their real problems or their psychological nature, are dispersed and fall into various forms of moral, social and physical degradation; Old Hurley, who is half ruined through having given his sons this expensive education, finds that they forget him or completely disown him, and in any case they are no longer fit to help him in the farm work; finally, to get out of a very difficult situation, he sets fire to the harvest in the hope of obtaining the insurance money. Here, as well as the satirical meaning, the social argument is clear: the play amounts to a full-dress sermon addressed to those bold reformers of society whose feelings Robinson himself shared in other respects; it is an attitude rather similar to that of Shaw, and of many other, especially realistic, writers of the same period, who marched in the vanguard of the political and social ideas of the time, but never neglected an opportunity of shattering the illusions and correcting the blunders (and sometimes of probing the hypocrisies) of their companions in the faith.

Patriots (1912) and *The Dreamers* (1915) are realistic and original interpretations of moments and episodes in

recent Irish history. In *The Lost Leader* (1918) a speculative and symbolistic element, not evident in the preceding works, has come in, which seems to have a vague relationship with the sort of drama which just about that time Pirandello was perfecting in Italy. The lost leader is Parnell, who, according to a popular legend in Ireland, survived under an assumed name. Here there appears a Lucius Lenahan, who pretends to be Parnell, and comments on the problems of Ireland in 1918 in the spirit of the great and unfortunate vanished chief. In the furious riot caused by his clear and harsh words, a blind man strikes and kills him; and the play ends without giving any precise answer regarding the identity of the character. Robinson followed this with other plays ranging from the realistic to the sentimental-lyrical: *The Round Table* (1922), *Portrait* (1925), *The White Blackbird* (1925), *The Big House* (1926) and *The Far-off Hills* (1928?). His two successful comedies must also be mentioned—*The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916), full of very lively situations and characters, which portrays, in an atmosphere not satirical but purely humorous, many comic aspects of Irish life, both private and public, and which is considered by some as Robinson's masterpiece; and *Crabbed Youth and Age* (1922, in one act), which shows how a mother who is middle-aged, but vivacious, witty and cultured, attracts the attention of all the men in her drawing-room, while her daughters, who are very modern but ignorant and stupid, are left on one side. It is a short but perfect comedy of manners.

T. C. Murray, a Catholic, was born in the county of Cork in 1873, and has been a country schoolmaster for a good part of his life. When, in spite of his great modesty,

his name became more widely known on account of his dramatic works, the only change he made in his life was to become master in an elementary school in Dublin. Among the Irish he is considered as the most purely Catholic dramatist, as opposed to Robinson, who rather expresses the Protestant attitude. In Murray's work, however, there is no parade of polemics or propaganda; he has been compared to those still waters which run deep. He began in 1909 with a comedy based on a social theme, *The Wheel of Fortune* (revised and produced again in 1913 under the title of *Sovereign Love*), which is a satire on the marriages arranged for money among Irish peasants; much later he treated the same theme, with tragic seriousness, in *Aftermath* (1922). In *Birthright* (1910) Murray shows the difference between two brothers, sons of a farmer; the elder, who by birthright should inherit his father's land, is a lively, imaginative, very sporting young man, a favourite of his mother, and not really adapted to farm life; while the second son, who is taciturn and jealous, resembles the father and is the eternal, typical farmer. But as the farm cannot support two families, the younger brother is to emigrate to America. On the eve of departure the father gets furious with the elder son, who does not seem to trouble himself about the farm work, and decides to make him go instead of the younger. When the former hears this decision, he suspects his brother of having influenced the father, and violently accuses him; the long-repressed jealousy of the younger brother then breaks out, and the elder is murdered in a furious struggle. In this brief tragedy the sweet, sad figure of the mother is beautifully drawn. *Maurice Harte* (1912) is the tragedy of a

young, intelligent peasant, whose parents want him to be a priest at all costs, although he confesses that he does not feel himself called to such a vocation. On the day when young Harte, having passed his examinations, is about to be ordained, he is overcome by the efforts and sacrifices he has made, his nerves give way, and he is brought home in a pitiful, almost insane, condition. *The Briery Gap* (1917, not performed) is the story of the suicide of a girl who has been seduced and is despised by all, even the village priest; *Spring* (1918, in one act, like the former play) is a grim satire on the fierce avariciousness of certain of the poorest Irish peasants. *Autumn Fire* (1924) is the tragic story of the rivalry in love between a widowed father, still capable of passion, and his son; this is a theme which O'Neill has also treated in *Desire under the Elms*, and although there is not space here, a comparison of the two works would serve very well to explain to some extent the characters of the two authors, showing the profound difference in feeling and point of view. Murray's next works were *The Pipe in the Fields* (1927, in one act), which contains a lyrical and imaginative element new to this author, and *The Blind Wolf* (1928), which is the story of a murder committed on account of starvation by a peasant family.

Murray has been accused of making use of too many chance coincidences, and, in many plays, of letting the curtain fall upon a situation destined to continue. In reality he is one of those realists, almost mystics of realism, who are not at all concerned with writing plays which are technically perfect and sure of success; neither does he worry too much about the *probability* of the events he

portrays, for this itself is really also a stage device, although perhaps the best of all. He feels and presents, with deep sympathy, and without presuming to judge, the real, positive *misery* of man—the concrete and active evil, both material and moral, which is in man. It is chiefly in this sense that Murray seems a *Catholic* artist; in this same sense he appears also genuinely dramatic, since evil and sorrow, felt and expressed as by him, lead us back to a starting-point where religion and drama meet, arising together from the same experience and the same need.

Before reaching the two Irish dramatists who may be termed very modern, MacNamara and O'Casey, we must also recall Douglas Hyde, who was president of the Irish Literary Society and of the Gaelic League, and who in 1901 produced a play in the Irish language, *Casad-an-Sugan* (The Twisting of the Rope), in Dublin, acting himself with an amateur company: in 1907 he collaborated with Lady Gregory in *The Poorhouse*, and also produced, in Irish, a Nativity play and the fantastic *The Tinker and the Fairy* (1912). He is a very notable figure in the history of the Irish literary revival, but not equally notable in the history of the drama.

Ulster had its own repertory theatre (the Ulster Literary Theatre), which was formed soon after the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and which, making allowance for the different atmosphere of environment, moved in similar directions. St. John Ervine, who has been spoken of elsewhere, gave his collaboration, although he was one of the directors of the Dublin theatre for some years; Rutherford Mayne had nearly all his works performed there, among which *The Drone*, *Red Turf* and *The Troth* (in one act) excel on account

of a certain rather gloomy and Calvinistic realism of their own. Another remarkable Ulster writer was Joseph Campbell, whose morality play, *Judgement*, was performed in Dublin in 1912, and who, having emigrated to America, was among the many Irishmen who helped to spread the new dramatic movement across the ocean.

The reader will have already noticed that most of the Irish works of some importance, mentioned so far, belong to the period stretching from the end of the nineteenth century up to the Great War. With the outbreak of the war all dramatic production in the British Isles was suspended, and it may be said that the realist and critical-social school, of which we have spoken a great deal in this and the preceding chapter, came unexpectedly almost to an end. The immediate and obvious occasion, not the cause, of this phenomenon was the upheaval of things and ideas brought by the war, and in Ireland also by the revolution; but what was the real cause, the spiritual reason for this sudden, and in some cases total, eclipse? An answer to this question has already been attempted in preceding chapters, and here we have only to apply it to the particular case of Ireland. The realists were moved by a moral and social impulse, sometimes unconsciously, of a revolutionary nature; they were the intolerant sons of a special moment in civilization. The war was a profound and total crisis in this same civilization, and it seemed to them that there was nothing more to say until the effects of the great upheaval began to reveal themselves. If, as one theory has it, the moral, or practical, and hence specifically historical, motive, so far as an artist's inspiration is concerned, only works or is felt occasionally,

then realist provincial drama would not have suffered such an unexpected and almost total eclipse; at least, the writers who did not enlist would have continued to draw inspiration from pre-war conditions, adding at the most some outlook or experience they had gained from the war itself. The truth is, on the contrary, that the war not only changed the material of experience, the stock contents of the realist drama, but completely suppressed this form of art, or this type of inspiration. Many writers of realist drama naturally survived the slaughter, and were not able wholly to change their style; many works associated with the realist drama appeared also after the war. But in these one notices an uneasiness, almost an indifference, as if the writer felt himself to be doing something for which the time has gone by, like an excellent musician in an orchestra, playing his part correctly but one or two bars behind the others. This is especially noticeable in Ireland, where the war, besides bringing, as it brought elsewhere, revolution in a broad, generic sense, also caused a definite political revolution, which reached its height with the events of 1916, and left traces which were to lead, a few years later, to the constitution of the Free State.

The young men who came of age during the war and the revolution found that this was no longer the time to indulge in emotional, elegiacal contemplation of the old evils of Ireland, and of the moral and material misery of her dreamy and melancholy people. Action had taken the place of sorrow, and this meant that the old dramatic and lyrical inspiration was necessarily replaced by an *epical* attitude, sometimes harsh and disappointed, but not to be mistaken for the true dramatic approach.

Brinsley MacNamara, a young man who had been an actor in the Abbey Theatre company, and was already known through some short stories and novels dealing with Irish social life, both realistic and satirical, such as *The Valley of the Squinting Windows*, represents a certain bond between the old realism and that new realism which, to employ a much used term whose sense is still very vague, one may call expressionist. His first work for the theatre was *The Rebellion in Ballycullen* (1919), a satire on the doubtful patriotism of an Irish village in the days of the great political risings. There followed *The Land for the People* (1920, final version 1927), which is a very bitter satire on the frequent agitations in Ireland for the re-distribution of the land. MacNamara then wrote two comedies, *The Glorious Uncertainty* (1923), which deals humorously with the typical Irish country race meetings, the bookmakers, and the dirty work that goes on at them; and *Look at the Heffernans!* (1926), which is based on village intrigues, hypocrisies, adventures and love affairs. But the most striking and characteristic work is *The Master* (1928), a complicated story of village intrigues in the extremely revolutionary year of 1918. The action revolves round the figure of an old and somewhat despotic school-master, James Clinton, and shows how the formation of the local sections of the hostile parties, the moderate Nationals and the Sinn Fein, depends entirely on the actions of Clinton himself, and more particularly of the priest and certain tradesmen, especially the inn-keeper. At the end everything remains very much the same as it was before all the confusion, or even before the revolution; the only truly revolutionary character in the comedy, Michael

Clinton, the young idealist, is eliminated by the others and is forced to exile himself.

This is still realism, as can be seen, with obvious traces of Ibsen remaining; but here there is the sense of an experience gone through and a disappointment suffered which was lacking in the pre-war realist. Someone has said that the motto of this comedy might be "*Plus ça change et plus c'est la même chose*"; the hidden idea behind all pre-war dramatic realism, not only British, was *ça peut changer*; the writers of those years had something of the apostle and the reformer in them, and laid bare the wound as the first necessary step towards a cure. For the new generation, on the other hand, war and revolution are an experience already suffered; the dreams of yesterday are compared with the realities of to-day, and an abyss is seen to lie between the two. An element of cynicism creeps in here also, as it has already penetrated English dramatic realism; but the old realism was anything but bitter, discouraged and cynical. A few solitary writers, such as Daniel Corkery, master of an elementary school and a painter, describe with crude and critical realism the new Socialist agitators (*The Labour Leader*, 1919); while A. P. Wilson in *Slough* (1914), but better still a writer hidden under the *nom de plume* of "Alpha and Omega" in *Blight* (1917), portray with cold detachment the conditions of life in the wretched Dublin slums, thus anticipating what was to be the material, and to some extent the spirit, of O'Casey's work.

Sean O'Casey came of a poor family in the Dublin slums and the little learning he was able to obtain was almost entirely self-taught. He worked as a newspaper boy, a railwayman and a bricklayer's mate, and in the evening

was an attentive spectator at the Abbey Theatre; in 1916 he helped in the organization of the Irish Citizen Army, and fought with it in the Dublin Rising, afterwards writing an account of his experiences, which was his first published work. It is said that at least eight plays of his were rejected by the Abbey Theatre before the production, in 1923, of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which immediately had a great popular success. In this play, a kind of melodrama, the scene is laid in a low-class suburb of Dublin at the time of the revolution; the numerous characters are all striking and full of life, while the action is confused and full of comic and satirical moments: a pseudo-patriot, who is a coward and an incurable gossip, causes the Black-and-Tans, the famous troops of British police, to pay a visit to the house, and an innocent girl, Minnie, is led away to be shot. *Juno and the Paycock*, which remains up to date O'Casey's masterpiece, was first performed in 1924. As with any of O'Casey's works, it is difficult to give a summary of this play; the scene is laid, so to speak, amidst the crowd, and the crowd passes across it with its characteristic, mysterious confusion. There is no trace of a theme, or rather there are a thousand themes and yet none at all; the author seems, at different moments, disgusted at everything and enthusiastic about everything; sometimes one feels in him, even while cursing, a religious spirit tinged with superstition; then, almost without a break, the embittered, rebellious cynic breaks out, and when one has fixed on this as the deepest spiritual character of the work, one comes across a scene which is a pure idyll, with streaks of crude sensuality and Freudism. The general impression which the play leaves is one of gloomy and widespread

tragedy, but without greatness except for the figure of the mother, Juno, who sees her son killed by the police, her daughter betrayed and abandoned, and her husband, for ever talking patriotic nonsense, always drunk; yet she rises above it all with a moral beauty of her own which is, in the atmosphere of the play, unexpected and engrossing, and asks God's forgiveness for not having suffered enough at the death of another woman's son in the neighbourhood; it seems to her that she is now being punished for this.

A similar method and environment is found in *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). The action, which takes place in the most tragic days of the rebellion of 1916, is still more intentionally disconnected. There are also more frequent crowds, or I should say *choruses*, of anonymous or almost anonymous characters—English soldiers, customers in the public-house, rebels, prostitutes and peasant women. The "Plough and Stars", which is the banner of the Citizen Army, is brought into the public-house while the bearer refreshes himself with a glass of beer. The central figure is really neither Jack Clitheroe, who commands a battalion of rebels and is left dead in a burning hotel, nor his wife Nora, who becomes insane on account of it; these two characters, who are superior in soul and intellect to their plebeian surroundings, only give a relief to the real protagonist of the drama, which is the crowd, with its multiform, mean, passionate, incoherent soul. Comedy and tragedy are interwoven in the same scenes, sometimes in the same moment; and the Dublin populace, whom O'Casey, first among all the writers mentioned here, brought thronging to the pit of the Abbey Theatre, to-day still feel him to be above all a comic, and almost a farcical

writer. The intellectuals, on the other hand, try to classify him according to their old mentality; they elaborate his "philosophy", and try to formulate a moral for his story, as, for example, that men live and talk, kill and die for dreams, while women suffer and die for realities. These attempts only show the narrow, patchy mentality of these gentlemen—a Protestant, Puritan mentality, seeking for possible alternatives, as compared to the disordered, patchy genius of O'Casey, who comes of an old and Catholic race, and is really of the people, with all the good and bad points, and all the genuine variety of instincts which his own nature brings with it. It is a mistake, historical and otherwise, to define him as a realist; because dramatic realism, in the form which it assumed in England and Ireland in its own period from the appearance of Ibsen up to the Great War, implies an intellectual and almost transcendental attitude, a prearranged conception of good, and the study of a reality as a *moral problem*, or a human phenomenon which diverges from the good and should be led back to it. O'Casey, like his American colleague O'Neill, has a religion, although he himself does not know what it is; he has passions and instincts; and actually it is only this concrete, individual personality of his that he expresses through the rather cinematographic and imaginative reproduction of the real. It is therefore perhaps more correct to call him *expressionist* than realist.

O'Casey, in contrast to O'Neill, shows a lack of culture which can restrain and at the same time enrich his temperament; and, as always occurs in similar cases, those critics who have solemnly defined and catalogued his form of art have harmed him, inducing him to do intentionally what

before he did by instinct. *The Silver Tassie* (rejected by the Abbey Theatre in 1928, and later performed in London) is a kind of vast choreography on the theme of the war, in which dramatic elements and motives of a fairly traditional type are intermingled; choruses, songs, music, mass movements and inanimate stage tableaux play an important part in the production. The "silver tassie" is a sporting trophy won by the young hero before the war; after the war we see him, maimed in the legs, furiously pursuing his former *fiancée* in an invalid chair round and round a dance hall, where she is dancing with a new, and whole, admirer. And the author does not condemn this girl, who is sensibly obeying her instincts as a woman and a future mother; it is true that he seems at times to rail at everything and at times to laugh at everything, but he does not consciously or deliberately condemn anything or anyone; he has no panacea to offer the audience after the drama has convinced them. We are perhaps nearer than it might seem to the inward, unconscious genius of Ibsen, but we are an immense distance from the pre-war realist drama, which was Nordic, Puritan and reformative, and always searching for possible alternatives. Before, sorrow was presented as a social and moral evil to be redeemed or eliminated; now it is only a reality seeking to express itself.

VII

THE AMERICAN THEATRE

Beginnings and developments of the American drama · O'Neill, Green, Connelly and the negro drama · Other contemporary writers

I HAVE already indicated many racial and intellectual ties which exist between Ireland and the United States in the field of contemporary, and not only dramatic, art. In some respects it seems that the step from London to Dublin is longer than that from Dublin to New York. Besides, Dublin and New York have points of reference and sources of inspiration in common which are not London and have much less influence on London, such as Paris and the Latin countries in general, the Russians, and even Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Ireland, like America, is less *insular* than England, in several respects: it is more *catholic*, not only in the specifically religious, but also in the general and etymological sense of the word. It can perhaps be said that there exists a "new America" as compared to the "old America": the old America is Anglo-Saxon and Quaker; the new America has tendencies towards Catholicism (at any rate in the generic sense) and is a mixture of many elements, among which those of Irish, Latin, Slav and Jewish origin have greater weight. The German element, as usual, hovers between the two. The general standard of American life is, nevertheless, Anglo-Saxon

and Quaker, not only through force of tradition and the practical, realizing power with which this element still shows itself to be gifted, but through the fact that it has also imposed its standards on immigration, thus preventing any noticeable change in the proportion of the races. The only corrective to this policy is the greater fecundity of the Irish, the Latins and the Poles—in general, the Catholics. Meanwhile the spiritual and national fusion of so many extremely unsimilar elements does not occur without intolerance and rebellion, which find an echo in literature and art; we have already noticed the modern phenomenon of American authors in voluntary exile.

In the drama, and also, I believe, in other forms of art, it can be seen that the old America has been, and to some extent still is, dependent on England and often a follower in her footsteps; the new America, on the contrary, prefers to be influenced by, and to influence, Ireland, France, Italy, the Slav and also the German countries. In America, the "rebellion" of the new generation against the old tends in substance to affirm an American attitude, that is, an instinct and intuition composed of national elements which were originally different, even including negro or half-caste, in contrast to the purely Anglo-Saxon and Quaker tradition founded by the Pilgrim Fathers who crossed the ocean in the *Mayflower*. An *American* drama begins to appear towards the end of the last century with the breaking-out of elements and tendencies which were not purely Anglo-Saxon, and with the meeting of dramatic tendencies, of English and other origin, with historical circumstances and trends of taste which were typically American, and hence no longer exclusively Anglo-Saxon.

I will try to give a summary of the most striking points in the short history of the American drama, compressing this part of the book into a much smaller space than the importance of the material calls for. This is rendered necessary, as it is usual to say in such cases, by the "general economy of the work", which is chiefly dedicated to the English drama; and is furthered by my personal ignorance, not only, or not so much, of the authors and their works, as of the atmosphere in which the latter were born, and of the publics among which and for whom they were created. My observation point has always been London, which in a sense is a good one, because those who do not have a very good understanding of England and her history will never wholly understand America; but in another sense it is a bad one, because there many American things appear distorted, and many essential aspects of the very new transatlantic people may be ignored or only half understood.

Echoes and reflections of European drama, chiefly English, are found in America up to the end of the eighteenth century, but they are distant and pale. The Quaker mentality, among other things, mistrusted the theatre, suspecting it of innate immorality; in certain American states it was not even allowed to exist. However, in 1845, Anna Cora Mowatt, a lady in New York society, gave to the stage a comedy of manners entitled *Fashion*, very conventional in form and rather childish, but which even then expressed an American point of view, satirizing the snobbery of the Americans about the aristocratic titles and family traditions, so often open to discussion, of us older Europeans: it was a local reaction to a local problem. In 1848 Benjamin Baker produced, with great success, *A*

Glance at New York, a kind of comedy-revue, which was a hotch-potch of melodramatic and comico-realistic elements, with characters drawn from the low quarters of the already large city. *Vaudeville*, with little scenes caricaturing popular types, developed a little later, and contributed, as we shall see, to the unfettering of American dramatic realism.

Dion Boucicault, an old acquaintance to those who have read the preceding chapters, wrote *The Octoroon* (1859), a very effective drama based on a subject which at that time, just before the Civil War, was one of burning reality—the condition of negroes and half-castes in the Southern States. It is the tearful love story of a half-caste girl, unoriginal in theme and plot; the originality lies in the diplomacy with which Boucicault managed to make his public sympathize to some extent with all the parties involved—the Puritan business men of the north, the upholders of slavery in the south, who were not without human feeling, and finally the poor negroes and above all the unhappy heroine. It was, however, a very important dramatic production, with an entirely American subject, and it prepared the way for later works of Boucicault and others. Already, in fact, before the end of the century we find a dramatist, Bronson Howard, living entirely on the drama and for the drama; his most significant work is *Shenandoah* (1888), which is also inspired by the Civil War. James A. Herne, the actor, shows a developed sense of realism in *Margaret Flemming* (1890) and *Shore Acres* (1892), drawing inspiration from the rough patriarchal life of the colonists in the distant provinces. Augustus Thomas followed his example, and exploited this idea, in

a series of romantic dramas such as *Alabama*, *Arizona* and others, where he relied, among other things, on the patriotism of certain provincial audiences.

Charles H. Hoyt, raising to a higher level elements of parody and local colour which had already been very successful in farces and variety, tried his hand at satirical provincial realism in *A Texas Steer* (1890), in which he pilloried ancient, petty local jealousies, and the unenviable characteristics of American political life. Although not always a humorist of the first rank, aiming rather at success than at artistic value, Hoyt was the founder of that comico-realist drama, of purely American taste and humour, which still flourishes, and for the most part does not stand exportation.

American humour lies almost wholly in action, and always refers to some deed, some concrete gesture of the will; there is nothing contemplative in it, nothing *lyrical* or impartial; even the English find it difficult to grasp, just as the Americans generally fail to appreciate typical English humour. It seems that for the Americans action, and therefore drama and comedy, cannot exist without visible *movement*, without a physical application of the will. When, therefore, the very popular actor William Gillette produced his play *Secret Service* (1896), he started a form of drama which one may call purely American, and which the general public enjoyed extremely. The plot deals with the adventures of an American secret service man in an enemy country, with the mortal perils he encounters, and with the coolness with which he plans and carries out cunning schemes to escape these dangers; a very banal little love story is interwoven with the rest. "Realism of

action", said a critic, and this realism of action was hence to remain as one of the recurring characteristics of a large part of the American drama. The public, on their side, saw in the hero a champion of the national virtues, or at least of those virtues which they liked to consider as such. The stage setting of this play, carefully arranged by the author, was distinguished by its realistic accuracy of detail, following a tendency which was then spreading in the best American drama, and which found its chief representative in David Belasco. From 1890 onwards the long historical dramas by Clyde Fitch were performed with great exactness of detail and scrupulous reconstruction; the author's fame, however, is more due to his later works, which are realistic with a certain echo of Ibsen. In *The Climbers* (1901) there is satire, realism and a problem: the play begins with a bold portrayal of the hypocrisy of those who attend a funeral, continues with a satire on Wall Street, and ends by offering, and recommending, divorce as the solution to the eternal triangle. The material of the play is new, and, with respect to America, resembles Ibsen in a certain sense; but the author's technique and taste are still in the old manner, and there is much which is conventional and melodramatic. *The Truth* (1906) is a better play, and perhaps Fitch's best work. Here he studies a character rather than a problem—the character of a woman whom appearances are against, who has lied, yet who at the end reveals and clears herself, becoming almost too good and pure. The surroundings from which this woman comes, and the revelation of her character against this background, are very cleverly portrayed.

William Vaughan Moody, a university professor and a

poet, advanced much further on the path of psychological realism in his only two plays, *The Great Divide* (1909) and *The Faith Healer*, written with a delicacy and penetration which are not always to be found in American drama. *The Great Divide* takes its facts from an incident which really occurred: Ruth, a girl of gentle birth, is surprised on a lonely ranch by three rascals who threaten to do her violence. At once, by instinct, she chooses from among the three the one who seems to her the best, Ghent, and promises herself to him provided he will defend her from the other two. Moody has taken the facts of this actual event, but his real drama begins afterwards, when Ruth and Ghent are married: she is a Puritan bound to a strict, and somewhat conventional, religious and moral tradition; Ghent is a man who has passed through sin and crime, and has finally found a motive for redemption in this woman who in so many respects is superior to him, whom he possesses and loves. This is a subtly tendentious drama, one of the first "anti-Puritan" works of art produced by modern America, and perhaps the first of such real merit. The antagonistic feeling which spread later among so many of the young intellectuals, who could no longer tolerate the traditions and conventions of the old America, nor accept the drab, materialistic mechanism of the new, might be said to date from this work. Ghent is the hero of the free life as opposed to narrow, negative tradition; he is the sinner who redeems himself through the love of the woman he has won—a motive not at all ascetic or negative, but positively and distinctly worldly; he is the optimist and the seeker after possible alternatives of a new Puritanism.

Parallel with these different forms of drama, the

melodrama became refined, modernized and Americanized. The very circumstances of American life, the primitive ingenuity of the public, and the still recent adventurous conquests of regions in the interior where modern life and intensive economic exploitation were unknown, opened up, perhaps, melodramatic possibilities of which there is no longer any trace in old Europe. The writer who used these possibilities with a certain fineness of art and sense of the theatre was David Belasco. The son of a gold-digger in California, a producer and a passionate lover of the theatre, he brought on to the stage (as Bret Harte, with superior art, brought to the novel) the adventurous and romantic atmosphere of his early childhood's memories. *The Girl of the Golden West* was produced at the beginning of the century, and before that *Madame Butterfly* (1900) in two acts. The Italian public know these works through the librettos which were made from them for Puccini's music, but naturally these librettos, even if written by expert hands, necessarily present a certain parody of the originals. For example, a thing which easily moves the audience in the original *Madame Butterfly* is the effort of the little Japanese to express herself in the language of her lover, which she hardly understands; naturally Butterfly's broken English disappears altogether in the Italian version. Besides delicacy of treatment and knowing exploitation of colour and sentiment, these works had an importance in the development of American drama on account of their original and clever stage setting, undertaken by Belasco himself, who employed technical devices which obtained great popularity. Belasco has, in general, had an influence on the development of all American drama, as an author

and more as a producer, opening up new paths for authors' imaginations, adding detail and elegance to the scenery, and to some extent anticipating the lavish production of the more serious future films.

Other writers of the pre-war period were Eugene Walter, a journalist, who obtained a success with the keen, ironical realism of *Paid in Full* (1907) and *The Easiest Way* (1908); Augustus Thomas, whose best works were *The Witching Hour* and *As a Man Thinks*; George Ade, with two charming realist comedies, *The County Chairman* (1903) and *College Widow* (1904); and Frank Craven, an actor, who wrote *Too Many Cooks* (1913) and *The First Year* (1920), in the latter of which the sad and happy experiences of the first year of marriage are portrayed.

The Great War, which violently brought all the European peoples, both friends and enemies, closer to each other, seems also to have somewhat narrowed the Atlantic; and if in Europe there are people who bewail the influx of American fashions, customs and films, the Americans, without complaining, take ideas, traditions and values from us, no longer only, or chiefly, from England, but from all countries, and grow fat on them. For example, when Maxwell Anderson, a scholar and a journalist, saw Pirandello's *Six Characters* performed in New York, he decided that the time was ripe to attempt a bolder and freer drama, a realism which, without scruples, whims or arbitrary optimistic "problemism", would face the *whole* truth. His *White Desert* (performed 1923) is a cruel story of jealousy in the bleak, snow-covered prairies of Dakota: a wife betrays her husband to revenge herself for his violent and unjust accusations of unfaithfulness, and is surprised

by him and murdered. As the play begins in a comic vein, the provincial public who saw the first performance did not distinguish the transition from the comic to the serious, being also misled by the crudely realistic and vulgar language of the protagonists, and, according to contemporary accounts, continued to laugh till the curtain fell. Anderson retouched the play and did not lose courage; a little later he met another journalist, Laurence Stallings, who had returned crippled from the war, and who, like him, was disgusted with dramatic conventions, especially as applied to the war, heroism and patriotism: they set themselves to write a realistic war play, and the result was *What Price Glory?* (1924), the first of its kind to have a world success. It was the vociferous renewal, if not the beginning, of that disillusioned war literature, of whose great vogue the reader need not be reminded. It was the first time that the language of the trenches and barracks had been brought almost unexpurgated on to the American stage, and this fact alone seemed like a revolution. It was not such a revolution after all, although this play is very remarkable; but from that time onwards many young writers became obsessed with a mania for low language on the stage, even writing plays in which nothing but the low language attracted notice. Anderson on the contrary, a man of taste and an unusual power of self-criticism, returned to a more shrewd, intimate and psychological realism in *Saturday's Children* (1927), a play well worth noticing.

George Kelly, an actor and a writer of vaudevilles, who in 1922 had a great popular success with a clever farce, *The Torchbearers*, reached a higher level of humour in *The Show-Off* (1924). This is an extremely plain and realistic

portrait of a type of suburban humbug and parasite. When a work of this kind is achieved, one realizes that the classical and post-Ibsenian realism was not in vain; but here the mental and moral attitude of the writer is quite different. Kelly once said to a journalist that he believed Tchekhov's *Three Sisters* to be the best play he had ever seen, and that it was his idea of drama. Perhaps no English writer of modern times could have written such a calm, sad, dispassionate, fierce work as *The Show-Off*, at the same time so well constructed, and with such a humorous first effect. Just as once the old social order was satirized by portraying all the misery and ridiculousness of the privileged classes, so here there is an indirect satire on modern American society, but written with a profound melancholy, which comes perhaps from the fact of having to consider misery as inherent in fatal, irremediable circumstances. *Craig's Wife* (1925) is no longer even humorous; it is the sad, objective, analytic (but still very dramatic) portrayal of a wretched type of woman. *Behold the Bridegroom* (1927) shows a return to the *problem*: it treats of a very modern American girl, mundane and worse, who has tried to *épater les bourgeois* with every sort of real and imaginary adventure, sexual and otherwise. But at heart she is a woman, like nearly all women, who unconsciously aspires to have a man of her own, on whom to concentrate her feelings and affections. When this man appears, they both feel that there now exists in her an insurmountable *unworthiness*, and she has to renounce the satisfaction of all the better desires and instincts of her life. One would guess that in Kelly's life, so far as women and love are concerned, there had been one of those intense experiences which

determine a standpoint and an atmosphere which cannot be modified later: his attitude recalls Becque and other modern European "disenchanteds"; his art, which technically and dramatically is very clever and consummate, has little resemblance, as regards inspiration and atmosphere, to modern Anglo-Saxon, and still less English, tradition; he is influenced by the Irish, Scandinavians and Russians.

Sydney Howard, another relatively young writer, has up till now taken a fairly similar direction to that of Kelly; he too, in recent times, has won the Pulitzer prize, awarded each year for the dramatic work which is judged the best. The prize-winning play was *They Knew what they Wanted* (1924), which presents scenes of somewhat savage life in the Napa valley in California, and which is boldly realistic, especially in the dialogue. *The Silver Cord* (1926) is a careful psychological study of a family rendered unhappy by the jealous selfishness of the mother; *Half-Gods* is more interesting as a document of the times, being a satire on modern American girls, too highly idolized by their men, rich, idle, and spoilt when they are not vicious. Here mention can also be made of Channing Pollock, on account of his two plays, of a somewhat symbolical and moralizing realism, *The Enemy* (1925, a pacifist play) and *Mr. Moneypenny* (1928, a satirical parable on contemporary "mammonism" rather on the lines of Papini's *Gog*); of Susan Glaspell, who with her husband, George C. Cook, organized and directed the Provincetown Players (chiefly famous for having made known O'Neill), for her comedies such as *Alison's House* (1930), which portray familiar surroundings and psychological problems with a certain penetration; and of John Lloyd Balderston on account of

Berkeley Square (1928), a very fanciful play, written in collaboration with the English critic J. C. Squire, and taken from a posthumous fragment by Henry James, entitled *The Sense of the Past.*

In the meantime the so-called "melodrama" was developing and assuming an increasingly distinct American aspect. In 1926 we have the extremely successful *Broadway*, by Philip Dunning and George Abbott, showing back-stage life in the artificial paradise of a night-club in the centre of New York—impossible love affairs, jealousies, feuds, purity and forgiveness, the whole worthy of the most conventional Hollywood film (in fact the film version of this work had an enormous success); but the drama unfolds itself, with accelerated speed, behind the scenes of the cabaret, and most of the characters are performers in it; the jazz band, which is half seen beyond the sliding doors, forms an accompaniment, and there is an electrifying rapidity, perversity and ingenuity in the whole play. The authors must have well studied the psychology of their vast public, in order to gauge it so well, not to mention that such a spectacle, to be well performed, requires extremely clever scenery and production. *Spread Eagle* (1927), by George S. Brooks and Walter B. Lister, may be quoted as a modern example of satirical-political drama in which many melodramatic elements are intermixed; and *The Racket* (1928) by Bartlett Cormack, like the very popular *Trial of Mary Dugan* (1927), is a very good example of the detective melodrama.

Eugene O'Neill is recognized without dispute as the greatest American dramatist of our time, but the attribute *American* is not enough to define him, and one could

almost say it was unnecessary. He is a writer with a very decided, singular and rebellious personality, of Irish descent and affinities, but restless and variable in inspiration and technique, as his work, by now very considerable, shows. One might say that humour and a sense of the comic are not a spontaneous part of his artistic nature, and observe that he has certain constant psychological characteristics, above all that of *passionateness*. Although the very striking genius of this author can be recognized in each of his works, one cannot yet say that there exists an "O'Neill style", and this is perhaps the greatest praise one can give him.

O'Neill's father and mother were both Irish, and he is a child of the theatre. His father was the actor-manager of a very second-rate company which toured the American provinces, and specialized in melodrama; the star piece was *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and the little Eugene took the part of the waves, running frantically up and down under a huge cloth which represented the blue Tyrrhenian sea. Small wonder that he grew up with an instinctive leaning towards the drama, but with a no less strong intellectual distrust of it and its old conventions, tricks and devices. His restless, inquiring temperament led him besides into experiments which were anything but literary and intellectual. At the end of his first year at Princetown University he threw a bottle of beer through the window into the Principal's study. Expelled for a year, he did not return to the university, but went to New York and elsewhere to look for work. He married and had a son, but soon perceived that this was not his vocation either, and three years later obtained a divorce. In the following years

we find him as a gold prospector in Central America, an assistant manager of a theatrical touring company, an ordinary seaman on a Norwegian barque bound for Buenos Aires, an employee in an electrical firm, and then in a firm for sewing-machines, a packer of wool at La Plata, a cattle-hand in a steamer which carried mules between Buenos Aires and South Africa, a sailor in the *de luxe* liners going from Southampton to New York, a very second-rate actor in his father's company, which at that time had also gone over to vaudeville, and finally a reporter on a Connecticut paper, in which from time to time he also published poems. It was at this point that the doctors warned him of a serious attack of lung trouble, which was threatening his life. He retired for a year into a sanatorium in the country, gave up alcohol and began to think of the drama with a new mind. A year later he attended Prof. G. P. Baker's Drama Course at Harvard University, a course which has numbered not a few of the best modern American dramatists among its pupils. O'Neill wrote, about that time, his first excellent one-act plays on nautical subjects: *Bound East for Cardiff*, *The Long Voyage Home*, *The Moon of the Caribbees*, *Ile*, *In the Zone* and others, eleven in all. He then made friends with some of the leading figures in the experimental theatre of Provincetown, and got them to produce some of his plays, not without success, but without becoming known to the general public. Meanwhile the war was continuing in Europe, and O'Neill became the complete Radical-Socialist in the circle of more or less unknown writers and dramatists, actors and actresses, who gathered round the Provincetown Players and the Little Theatre Movement in general,

which was now already developing and flourishing in several parts of America, a direct or indirect offspring of the various Independent Theatres which had sprung up in Europe during the preceding forty years.

Bound East for Cardiff, O'Neill's first work to be performed, was produced in Provincetown in 1916; in 1920 his first play in three acts, *Beyond the Horizon*, also on a seafaring subject, was finally performed in New York, and won the Pulitzer prize for that year. O'Neill, hardly thirty-two (he was born in 1888), was thus launched before the great public of Broadway, the theatrical heart of New York and of all America. There followed, to mention only his chief works: *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *Anna Christie* (1921), *The First Man* (1922), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *All God's Chillun got Wings* (1924), *S.S. Glencairn* (1924), *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *The Fountain* (1925), *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Marco Millions* (1928), *Strange Interlude* (1928), *Dynamo* (1929) and the trilogy *Mourning becomes Electra* (1931).

Bound East for Cardiff shows a sailor, Yank, dying in his bunk as the result of a fall in the hold, while his rough companion, Driscoll, attends him and tries to comfort him as much as he can in his rude way. The tramp steamer is making slow progress through the sea fog, and every other minute the blast of the whistle is heard. Other sailors, sketchily portrayed, come in and out of the dim cabin in their dripping oilskins. The strange, broken, coarse dialogue of the two friends is among the noblest and most beautiful things in modern drama: their slang acquires a rhythm and a swing which make one think of Synge, by whom O'Neill was certainly influenced. The drama lies

wholly in the contrast between these poor human creatures and the hostile elements which *live* all round them, between the spark of soul they reveal and their monotonous, brutal and obscure fate, between their timid, confused longing for affection and the death which takes place in the midst of the fog, without tears or lament. This is the drama, and yet, as also in Verga, the ultimate artistic effect of the dialogue is *epical*; it is a confession, a pure poem, a song, which expresses the author's feeling in a fresh and ingenuous way.

Anna Christie being better known, at least on the screen, let us examine *The Emperor Jones*. The hero is a sort of negro tyrant who is seen, in the first act, enthroned in his palace; he is petulant and solemn, a mixture of the cruel and the grotesque. His enemies force him to leave the palace and flee into the jungle. In the six successive scenes we see him alone in the forest, a prey to ancient, atavistic fears. "They are", says a critic, "six progressive stages of his rising terror. They are expressionistic rather than realistic, each one a vision his brain conjures up as terror more and more overwhelms him, each one a vision going farther back into his racial past, to the slave market, the slave ship, and then the black superstition of the African jungle" (W. P. Eaton, *The Drama in English*, p. 334). All through these six scenes there is nothing but Jones' monologue, his rising madness, which, before these apparitions, these silent groups, pervades the scene. In the distance is heard the uninterrupted beat of the tom-tom of his enemies. At the end Jones comes out of the jungle at the same place where he went in, and here his enemies await him and kill him.

The tom-tom in *The Emperor Jones* can be compared to the repeated blast of the whistle in *Bound East for Cardiff*; some would call them stage devices to excite the nerves of the audience. In reality they are symbolical elements dramatized; they represent, in both cases, a brooding Fate, a predestination. Since we have already spoken of predestination with regard to English and Scotch Protestant writers, we may observe the form it assumes with an American of Irish and Catholic origin: whether O'Neill is dealing with ancestral terrors latent in the soul, as with Jones, or with a strange, cruel Nature, as in all his sea dramas, man's destiny, here, always depends on a terrible, unequal struggle between man and a *created* reality from which he is sharply distinguished. If Providence does not intervene and assist man with a power which is not wholly human, we know already that he will succumb. This attitude can be found even in the subsequent psychological and psycho-analytical plays. O'Neill, irreligious in his beliefs, does not perhaps perceive that, in his own particular form of anti-Puritanism, there is implied a Catholic outlook in the strictest sense—the acceptance of the positive, powerful reality of evil, and the existence of grace and the miraculous. Fate, even when it interweaves itself with man, is always a *different thing* from man, who presses and struggles against it with all the violence of passion; with O'Neill, therefore, the tragical is hardly ever the contrast of distinct and opposed personalities, but the unequal and desperate struggle of each character against an *objective* reality which hangs over him. In this atmosphere the psychological elements also become the *object*, or tragic fate; and in this can perhaps be found the reason for

O'Neill's *tragic* superiority over all other living Anglo-Saxon writers (and also the reason for his scant popularity in Protestant, alternative-seeking England), in the fact that he does not confuse man with his destiny, his internal passions or his follies; he sees man as a subject who is *struck*, even if it be in his most inward and secret fibres, by these passions, disasters and follies. At the most, if there occasionally figures in his plays a man of destiny, he will be a type of old American Quaker, a product of Puritanism. Such, for instance, is the father in *Desire under the Elms*, a strict, miserly, despotic old man, who at his second wedding marries a young girl, and she fatally, irresistibly, falls in love with his son.

Even when O'Neill, as in *Strange Interlude*, resolutely attacks a theme dear to psycho-analysts, that of "frustration", he extracts tragedy from it; for the heroine, Nina, who has lost her lover in the war and will remain all her life a woman unsatisfied in her profoundest needs and instincts, is still always a *subject*, a personality, a free human soul; and the frustration is like a disease, a profound impression which is made on her by outward circumstances, from which she will never be able to free herself, and against which, eternally defeated, she will eternally rebel. This play, in nine acts, takes six hours to perform; the author has also attempted to give dramatic expression to what the Freudians call the "subconscious": the action continually stops while this or that character, looking into space, expresses out loud his or her inward, unconfessed, unspoken thoughts. It is, in fact, the *aside* of the old school, reinstated with a very new function. All those who read the play before it was acted swore that no public would be

able to stand such a work, but, on the contrary, *Strange Interlude* was a great success. O'Neill's technical audacities, after all, always adhere strictly to the subject he is treating, and are not thought out separately and then added; for that reason the audience generally accepts them readily, even if at first it loses its bearings for a few minutes.

The trilogy *Mourning becomes Electra* resembles a great classic model in its general outline. Here the hostile gods are replaced by the Freudian complexes, especially the "Oedipus complex", which compels the son and daughter of old Mannon, an American Brigadier-General of very ancient descent, to love respectively their mother and father. When the mother, in order to elope with her own lover, murders her husband, the children pursue the fugitives and in their turn murder the lover, and finally perceive that they are bound to each other by a latent incestuous passion: it is the Oedipean love, which first bound the son to the mother, the daughter to the father, and now unites the brother and sister, who find in each other the same features and characteristics as in their parents. The action ends with the suicide of the brother, which follows that of the mother, and with the return of Lavinia, the daughter, to the ancestral home, full of ghostly memories.

In this ancient tragic chain, seeming strangely audacious in these times, the Catholic, anti-Puritan Irishman is revealed again, the enemy of the Anglo-Saxon race and religion, which dominated in Ireland, the country of his origin, and predominates in his adopted country. The terrible Mannons, whom such a pitiless nemesis seems to overshadow, are really representative of the oldest race of

English Nonconformist settlers, transplanted centuries ago into New England, and uncompromising in their religious, social and economic dogmas; they are the "man-eaters" of the new America, the tyrants who are always thinking of death and pray to God according to Calvin. It is not that O'Neill has quarrels to pick, or social arguments to support; nevertheless, he always remains the best exponent of the rebellion of a new America, more original and eclectic, against the old, on which certain imprints received at the time of its origin are still deeply stamped.

We have seen that O'Neill, in *The Emperor Jones* and other works, has touched on the negro theme, and how he made use of the small experimental and provincial theatres to start his career. To the experimental and "little" theatres must be added those of the universities, very numerous in America, which have largely helped towards the development of American drama in the last twenty years. This is a necessary reaction to the commercial theatre and the dictatorship of the Broadway public, who are easily swayed by advertisement and inclined to overestimate those stage elements which produce an immediate effect but are of little artistic value. Yet in these enterprises there is the danger that they may end by attracting a restricted public of initiates, resulting in a total loss of contact between the author and the masses, and, since the masses represent the average common reality of an epoch, between the author and that reality. O'Neill's triumph and success both with the masses and with the initiates can be explained also by his defects: he is capable of easily losing contact with culture, though not so easily with reality, in the simplest and most elementary sense of the word. He

is wanting in finish, artistic restraint, humour and self-criticism; he is like a force of nature, obscure, disordered and confused, but so rich and spontaneous that the public is carried away and submits to him. By this I mean the American public; the English public, for example, remains suspicious and irritated after seeing these plays; its moral sense and its fineness of taste rebel against accepting them as anything more than interesting manifestations of a paradoxical and abnormal genius. Cultured Europe, in fact, has to make an effort to return to its own forgotten origins, to an atavistic simplicity and rudeness of heart, in order to appreciate this form of art which the Americans, on the other hand, have accepted with a relative ease and readiness.

The little provincial and university theatres also contributed towards the development of provincial, characteristic sources of inspiration, such as the mentality and life of the negroes, which O'Neill also touched on. The idea, as has been seen already, was very old, but Paul Green, in the University theatre of North Carolina, was among the first seriously to develop its artistic possibilities according to modern taste. He began with some one-act plays, which still showed a trace of regional dilettantism; *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926) shows a great step in advance, and is Green's first successful attempt at constructing a longer and more complex play. Here again, the anecdotic realism of its origins makes itself felt: the three acts are still rather like three episodes created separately and bound together; the very psychology of the negroes, jerky, incoherent, passionate and grossly assimilative, seems to exclude the possibility of an ample drama, with solid motives sustained through a

complex plot. *The Field God* (1927) confirmed and sealed Green's success. Marc Connelly followed in the footsteps of Green and others, and in *The Green Pastures* (1930) produced an objective dramatization of the ingenuous biblical faith of the negroes; he portrays the Sacred Story from Noah's Ark to Babylon and Jerusalem as it might be imagined by a negro in the Southern States, quite sincerely and without a trace of satire. God appears as an old preacher somewhat versed in diplomacy; the archangel Gabriel, with his terrible trumpet, is a species of little negro who is more intelligent and restive than the others, who assumes the role of special secretary to the Boss; the Angels have fish fries and ingenuous picnics, like the negroes on the plantations on feast days. It might be a sound-film, so frequent is the use of imaginative or semi-imaginative motives, whose effect relies entirely on the scenery and production. This imaginative element is found in all Connelly's dramatic productions—in the numerous vaudevilles and revues composed and staged with Kaufman, and in *Wisdom Tooth* (1926), which treats of a poor "Babbitt" of New York who magically finds again his childhood self, and through this contact becomes optimistic and happy, and regains a humble faith in himself and in life which he had lost.

But the number of plays about negroes is now extremely large; here we must limit ourselves to indicating a few. We might go back to an earlier date and recall *The Nigger* (1908) and *Salvation Nell* (1908) by E. B. Sheldon, quote one by one the *Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro* (Washington Assoc. Publishers, 1930), collected and edited by Willis Richardson, and finally recall the

successful comedy *Porgy* (1928) which Dorothy Heyward adapted from her own novel and wrote in collaboration with her husband, Dubose Heyward, and which portrays the life of the negroes in the great urban districts.

A few further remarks, however short, may serve to guide the reader through the maze of American drama. There is Owen Davis, for example, who, after having spent half his life making films and very effective melodramas, was seized with the desire to add another plume to his great notoriety, and launched into provincial realism with *Icebound*, a comedy of manners with an agricultural setting in New England, which won the Pulitzer prize in 1923. Upton Sinclair, much better known as a novelist, developed the problem of American prison reform in *Singing Jailbird* with a lively expressionist technique. Philip Barlow, a Catholic, had an extremely precocious success with *You and I* in 1923, but he is chiefly notable for *Paris Bound* (1927), a lively problem play, in which the importance which the common mentality attaches to the material fact of adultery is debated, and, in contrast with it, the moral and almost sacramental value of marriage, if truly felt, is reaffirmed as being beyond and above the material fact. *Hotel Universe* (1930) also had a great success.

Two women writers must also be mentioned: Zona Gale, a novelist, portrayed in *Miss Lulu Bett* (1920) a poor, unattractive provincial woman who is lured into a false love affair and a false marriage, and then, abandoned, comforts herself with that crumb of happiness which was conceded to her; later, but with less success, she tried to produce the

corresponding masculine type in *Mr. Pitt* (1924). In 1928 Sophie Treadwell, an expressionist, wrote *Machinal*, in eleven scenes (later it was performed in London with the title of *The Life Machine*); it aims at being the drama of a woman, rich in affection, imagination and temperament, in the cold and fatal "life machine" of modern times, and is a fresh and not ineffective variation on a theme which to-day is very common.

As can be seen, the women are naturally preoccupied with their own sex. Turning to the men, we find another little group of well-known dramatists. Robert E. Sherwood, who had served in the war, and, like so many others, lost his illusions about military glory and the reliability of historians in general, gave a modern setting to the story of Hannibal in *The Road to Rome* (1927); later he indulged in historical-political satire in *The Queen's Husband* (1928), which in some ways seems slightly to anticipate *The Apple Cart* by Shaw; finally in *Waterloo Bridge* (1930) he too attacked, with originality and success, the theme of the psychology and tragedy of the masses during the Great War. Theodore Dreiser, so harsh and unconciliating even as a novelist, seems to have still less desire to adapt himself to the ancient laws of the drama; his novel *An American Tragedy* was dramatized with some success in 1925, but his *Plays Natural and Supernatural* (1930) are mostly better to read than to act.

Another famous novelist, Thornton Wilder, wrote a number of one-act plays, which vary from a mysticism which is sometimes Franciscan and sometimes symbolistic, in the manner of Housman and Yeats, to expressionism and the very modern type of "drama of the masses".

Among his more recent works are *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* and *The Sleeping-Car Hiawatha*. The former deals with a little "Babbitt" and his family who go in the car to spend the week-end with a married daughter; there is no scenery, and two benches represent the seats of the Ford; the characters, who are types from the masses rather than individuals, are subtly portrayed, especially the figure of the mother. *The Sleeping-Car Hiawatha* is the story of an affectionate wife who feels herself dying of heart disease in her *wagon-lit*, and asks the attendant to lock the door communicating with her husband's compartment, so that his sleep shall not be disturbed by her groans of agony. In the drama as in the novel, Wilder seems to have a great deal to say, but perhaps he has not yet struck his unique, exclusive note which will distinguish him from any other writer. John Dos Passos has shown that he possesses interesting dramatic possibilities in *The Moon is a Gong* and *Airways, Inc.*

Elmer L. Rice adopted even before the war (I do not know if consciously or not) that expressionist technique which was beginning to make itself felt in Germany. Expressionism differs only in technique from impressionism, realism and the other artistic *isms*; the aim and object of art (although so difficult to define) remaining the same since the world began. It is another step forward from romantic realism: it is a matter of projecting on to the stage the internal motives of the soul of one or more characters; and it is not mere chance that this tendency was born in the country which gave birth to psycho-analysis, and that it then caught on in America, where still to-day psycho-analysis predominates in cultivated circles,

with its truths and its excesses, its serious and facetious aspects. *On Trial*, Rice's first successful play, is simply the presentation of the facts leading up to a murder, which are gradually portrayed on the stage as the witnesses bring them to the knowledge of the judge; it is a drama, therefore, which unfolds itself *à rebours*, showing us the long psychological process which caused the hero to murder the man who had once cruelly seduced his wife. After various failures, Rice had a fresh success with *The Adding Machine* (1923), a prototype of the expressionist drama, with fantastic and symbolistic elements which are not among its best points. It treats of the wretched life of Mr. Zero, crushed between a nagging wife and a tedious job in a counting office. When the boss tells him he is sacked, and will be replaced by a machine, Mr. Zero sees red (in fact there is a flash of red on the stage) and kills him. After Mr. Zero has been condemned to death by a court which is, in its turn, a projection of the ideas he might have about the law, we find him beyond the tomb, where he is given a huge adding machine to work; but even this time he does not seem capable of success, and is sent back to the earth to suffer as before, among the millions of other poor Zeros who toil for a bare living in this fatally standardized world of ours. There is nothing realistic in the scene or the plot; it is simply a series of stage representations of the states of soul of one man. But the danger of this form of play is that these states of soul are somewhat approximative; there is analysis but no synthesis; the man, the unmistakeable individual, is lacking. Thirty or forty years ago, when it was the custom to write novels and plays with an anatomical and physiological realism, this literature diffused many

scientific ideas, but in itself contained very little human reality; in the same way this new realism, based on the modern empiric psychology of the psycho-analysts, easily loses sight of man as a living and exclusive unity, an *absolute* person; and when it does not fall into the symbolical and purely imaginative, it has to rely too much on stage devices and setting. All this may help the theatre against the redoubtable competition of the cinema, but to the drama and theatre as such it is of no use at all.

In *Street Scene* (1929) Elmer Rice returns to a more direct study of individual characters and situations, although here too the principal character, almost the hero of the play, is the street of a mean quarter in New York, with the large, dreary "walk-up" apartment-house, divided into so many little dwellings for the poor. One would say that all the tragedy or comedy of the many events which are interwoven in the three acts is derived fatally from the condition and atmosphere of the environment. *See Naples and Die* (1929) is set in Naples and presents caricatured characters of the most contrasted nationalities; it is of much less interest than the preceding works. Finally we must mention *Late Night Final* (1931) by Louis Weitzenhorn, an expressionist, almost cinematographic, drama on a social theme, in which extensive use is made of the revolving stage and of the division of the stage into so many little sections, sometimes more than one appearing at a time. The action takes place simultaneously in several places, and the public can follow it in minute detail. The theme which is presented is that of the unconscious, brutal cruelty and dishonesty with which the yellow press pursues sensational news at all costs. As far as technique is con-

cerned, this play makes a direct attempt at beating the cinema on its own ground, not only by the great rapidity and variety of the short scenes, but also by presenting several simultaneous scenes on different levels of the stage.

The Americans in general reveal even in the drama two great qualities—initiative and boldness. They often make mistakes; they are not without awkwardness and ingenuousness, but they make attempts and take risks. And they have, it seems, publics who follow them attentively and fervently. The scarcity of tradition and the frequent superficiality of taste are compensated by this fervour, this optimistic desire for the new, on the part of those who write, those who produce and those who form the audience. The theatre *pays*, and even the most audacious and original writers keep an eye on the box-office. This may seem a defect, but it is also a merit; the box-office signifies a wider public, a more intense and widespread participation of the public in the life of the dramatic work. It is not seldom that the box-office passes a righteous judgement on works which have sprung more from an intellectual effort than from genuine inspiration or invention, or confers recognition on important works which have escaped the analytical eye of the critics.

VIII

ENGLISH DRAMA AT THE PRESENT DAY, WITH A FEW DIGRESSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Maugham, Milne, Wallace and many others · Sherriff and the "professional drama"; Van Druten · Coward, variety and the cinematographic drama · Digressions and conclusions

THERE are some writers whom one does not know where to place, and they are always up to date, even when their works are not performed. For example, I now discover with surprise that Horace Vachell was born as long ago as 1861; I knew that he had been an officer, and had then retired and lived for seventeen years on a ranch in California. It suddenly occurs to me that this man is of Conrad's generation, and resembles Conrad in some features of his inspiration; but what makes him more modern is a certain metaphysical anxiety of which there are traces in some of his dramatic works, such as *Searchlights* (1915), *The Fourth Dimension* (1920), *Fellow Travellers* and *The Yard* (1923). Perhaps his short stories, however, remain the best and most genuinely artistic part of his work. Of quite a different temperament is Thomas Sturge Moore, a poet, critic and engraver, whose best and freshest dramatic work is, I think, not *Medea*, *Niobe*, *Judas* (1923), or the trilogy in verse *The Tragic Mothers* (1921), but *The Powers of the Air* (1921), a half-mystical, half-philosophical

dialogue. Maurice Baring, the diplomat, has written plays, novels and poetry: his *Diminutive Dramas*, which appeared in different groups up till 1925, are not dramatic, but subtly imaginative, rich in taste and insight. Then there is Edward Garnett's *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*, written some years before Shaw's well-known work; it was recently revived in London at the Arts Theatre Club, and revealed itself as a work which anticipates with a certain cleverness the modern taste for careful psychological reconstructions of great historical figures and events.

Harold M. Harwood and Harold F. Rubinstein are also difficult to classify. Harwood, first a doctor and then a business man, has, after many years of activity as a dramatist, ended by becoming the manager of a fashionable London theatre, and his wife is Fryniwyd Tennyson Jesse, a great-grandniece of the great Victorian poet. Harwood and his wife have written in collaboration a tragedy, *The Black Mask* (1914), and a more successful work, *The Grain of Mustard Seed* (1920). The latter is a very lively and subtle satire on certain aspects of the spiritual and political life of modern England; it deals with a certain Jerry Weston who stands for parliament, canvassing with simple advertising slogans, such as "Vote for Weston and Cosie Cottages", and the contrast between his unspoilt fervour and the corruption around him forms the base of the comedy. *Cynara* (1930), written by Harwood in collaboration with R. Gore Brown, is the story of a masculine infidelity, told by a husband to his wife in a picturesque setting at Capri, about a little dressmaker's girl who became his mistress and finally committed suicide. It is cleverly contrived and modern in style: but that is all.

Rubinstein, already known for chronicle plays written in collaboration with others such as *Shakespeare* and *Churchill*, and a biblical play, *Exodus*, published in 1930 a collection of *Plays out of Time*. A man who from the title declares his work to be "out of time" deserves without doubt to figure among our most modern writers, who, after the orgy of realism and historical writing of the preceding century, just bring on to the stage everything which interests them, and leave it at that. In Rubinstein, however, there is still a critical background, a moral standpoint. In *Britannia Calling*, for example, he develops a certain theme: it is a modern comment on a story of Roman Britain. *Stephen into Dickens*, on the other hand, shows the fusion of three different dreams, dreamt by a man under the influence of anaesthetic. Although Rubinstein is very shrewd and clever, he remains nevertheless half-way between various influences and different tastes, between psychological realism, historical-imaginative moralism and expressionism. His personal touch is of a lyrical nature rather than dramatic.

The difficulty of classification has made me speak here of these writers; but certain writers are unclassifiable on account of their elusive artistic nature, through the lack of an aesthetic-moral central motive to hold their work, often varied, abundant and successful, together. William Somerset Maugham is the most characteristic of these, and perhaps the most successful. Born in 1874, he finished his medical studies at Heidelberg, and practised for a long time in London. He started to publish novels in 1897, without receiving much attention from the critics, and in 1902 made his début as a dramatist in Germany with

Schiffbrüchig, a play in German. In 1903 *A Man of Honour* was performed in London, and there followed (to quote only the most important) *Lady Frederick* (1907), *Penelope* (1909), *Smith* (1909), *The Tenth Man* (a tragic comedy, 1910), *The Circle* (1921), *Our Betters* (1923) and *The Breadwinner* (1930). Let us examine some of Maugham's plots. *Smith* is the story of a parlourmaid who has long conversations with the brother of her mistress; understanding, then respect, and then love are established between the two, and they marry. Anyone can see the great dangers, of banality on one side, of grotesqueness on the other, which such a theme presents; Maugham has overcome them, and has written a play which some compare to the old comedy of manners in the style of Congreve; but, apart from the creative background being very different from that of the extremely conventional eighteenth-century writers, there is here also an immediacy, a humanity of emotion and a psychological insight which are quite modern. *The Circle* (considered by some to be Maugham's best work) shows how a girl, as her mother-in-law has done before her, escapes from a husband she does not love to embark on the adventure of "real love"; the mother-in-law is an incorrigible flirt, but the young woman is ordinary, although a little intense. There is no moral to the fable, no argument, although much of the play is true to life and sympathetically written, and some of the characters are drawn in a masterly fashion, with a touch of ironical cruelty. *Our Betters* portrays the rich American women who marry titled Englishmen in exchange for money, and then remain dissatisfied and out of place all their life. *The Breadwinner* tells how the father of a family, on the

Stock Exchange, refuses to avert disaster and goes bankrupt on purpose, in order to free himself from his frivolous and indifferent wife and his selfish and rebellious children, finally going off by himself with a slender income.

As can be seen, Maugham very often strikes a bitter note; he contemplates reality, and the human soul, and tries to understand and bring out hidden motives, but refuses to pass judgement; he has the eye of the doctor, the relativism of the scientific man, and hardly ever the passionate mind of the moralist. His only thesis seems to be that man should be different from what he is. He has not any striking passion of his own, and therefore has no *epos*, and lacking this at heart, he lacks also the clash of feelings, the crisis, the real *drama*. His passion, if anything, is intellectual; he likes to probe the inward processes of the human mind, and to extract tragedy and comedy from those most deeply hidden, and essentially *physical*, forces, which are the most common and yet the least commonly understood. For this reason his best plays have a background of melancholy bitterness; they are contemplative and *lyrical*. But Maugham always succeeds in interesting and amusing his audience, and perhaps on account of this he has not resisted the temptation to use his powers in order to obtain less artistic but more remunerative successes, such as *East of Suez* (1922), a sensation drama of "effect". This utilization of the drama for ends not purely artistic would not even have occurred to him as a possibility if his dramatic inspiration had had its origin in some very genuine and profound element of his spiritual nature; with this Maugham's artistic limits as a dramatist are revealed, and perhaps this continual ability to amuse is also the

reason why his plays are so easy to translate, and are also successful abroad.

But even the success of this author seems to prove that the salient, *heroic*, dramatic period which forms the chief object of this volume is exhausted, for the public, for the authors, and for the consciousness of the epoch. Morally, that is, from the point of view of the internal emotion and spiritual fervour shown in the work, and from the point of view of *intention*, which is inseparable in a certain sense from all artistic inspiration, Maugham is the equivalent of Noel Coward and all the other clever modern inventors of spectacles. The war ended the epoch in which the public assembled in the theatre, drawn by certain authors, to relive their own social drama, to face it, and to be moved, enlightened and even guided in a practical and everyday sense. To-day one would say that this society only *endures* its drama. And the theatre, in conjunction with the cinema and other pastimes, only seeks to amuse it, as it has always done, for that matter, in its great periods as in its bad ones. Men such as Maugham and Alan Alexander Milne have passed through the period of the great realist, reformative, middle-class, anti-middle-class rage, without being affected by it, other than superficially; in their tranquil role of clever commentators, slightly opportunist, one would say they belonged to all periods, and were contemporaries of Pinero and Shaw as well as Wallace and Coward: they are writers who are never great enough to express, and thus to dominate, one moment or one aspect of history, but they are clever enough to know always how to trot along at history's side.

A. A. Milne, a Scotchman educated in England, has had

a very varied literary career, without making any great attempts or arousing very great emotions. His work ranges from his first essays of dramatic criticism, collected in book form in 1910, and then in 1912 and following years, to the little stories and charming poems for children written while he was on the staff of *Punch*, and includes numerous comedies, written with the same bland irony and witty comment on life. He is a *sane*, cultured and well-balanced author, and, if this guessing be permitted, a happy man. And if he was not so urbane, so benevolent, such a *gentleman*, if he had not all the consciousness and reserve of a man of good and wide education, his *healthiness* might be found rather annoying—that inclination to see everything through rose-coloured spectacles, and to walk always with cautious steps along the safest paths. But he pleases the public; he has always pleased them, and has always had many faithful followers in England. In contrast to the Latins, the English preserve a primitive, almost physiological, childishness, which is liable to undergo, and often does undergo, sudden and rapid changes of direction, from the coldest and most conventional strictness to a purely sub-human moral relativism; but this happens because at heart they are still relatively fresh and childish; and they never neglect to honour and support those who know how to strike this childish chord in their hearts.

It is not that Milne is the dupe of his own game; we must not forget that he is Scotch, and that what has been said about other Scotchmen also applies to him: perhaps on account of his Celtic parentage he resembles more closely the French and Italians. Thus in Milne one finds a certain vague affinity with the Parnassian and decadent

ironists such as Flaubert and Anatole France, allowing for due proportion; and in some of his serious works, such as *Success*, there is also a trace of intimist influence. But it seems that he has set out, like other Scotchmen, to meet Anglo-Saxon taste, and, as far as practical results go at least, he has succeeded admirably. Many of his comedies have been successful; we may mention *The Great Broxopp* (1920), *The Romantic Age* (1921), *Success* (1923), *Ariadne, or Business First* (1926), and *Michael and Mary* (1929). Let us examine the last, which is very characteristic of Milne. Mary is a charming young girl from the provinces whose husband has suddenly abandoned her, leaving her alone in London with her little son; Michael is an active young writer of considerable promise. The two meet in a room in the British Museum, in one of the early years of this century; Mary is contemplating suicide, Michael is contemplating a masterpiece. Their hearts agree, their hands meet, and their mutual future is decided. Fourteen years later, when Mary's son is at school (officially as the son of Michael), Mary's husband, a bad lot, returns from America and comes to the house to attempt blackmail. This man suffers opportunely from acute heart disease, and when Michael, exasperated and indignant, gives him a threatening push, he falls over and dies of syncope. The legal formalities which follow this occurrence would be less serious if Michael did not want to avoid making public the story of Mary and her son; but later, when the boy falls in love with a girl whom he suddenly marries, the whole story is related to them both, and the comedy has the happiest of endings. Many of the scenes, such as the first in the British Museum, are very charming and subtly

humorous; others are almost moving, and in the third act there is also a dramatic phase. The actors were admirable and it was a great success. English men and women, the latter above all, even those of the most refined and reserved mentality, went into ecstasies. On a different, slightly more artificial, plane than that of Maugham, Milne too had found the way to satisfy their needs, if not exactly their artistic sense; his art is rather like that of the cook who knows how to prepare the food according to the stomach of the consumer.

Now that we are talking of successful drama, we must recall the abundant and successful production of Edgar Wallace. Some titles of his plays reveal their nature, such as *The Ringer*, *The Squeaker*, *The Terror*; others are more subtle and allusive, such as *On The Spot* (1928), *The Calendar* (1930), *The Mouthpiece* (1930). All these plays are derived on one hand from Grand Guignol, on the other from the American "drama of action" which has been spoken of, including detective plays, secret service plays, and so on. Wallace, who died a few years ago, to the sorrow of many who justly appreciated him, was a clever purveyor of thrills. The Anglo-Saxon *thrill* is a slight shiver in the bones, which is desired, waited for, and received with relief; it is a slight intoxication of which we rid ourselves with a little internal electrical discharge—something like a sneeze. If it becomes too great or offends the moral sense, it is no longer a thrill but a shock. In the damp and capricious climate of England, the thrill is a need which is universally felt, and is hence an institution. Many things which some people complain of (with a certain degree of truth) in the moral attitude and inconsistent humour of

the English can be explained by this necessity of reacting with the nerves against the heaviness and boredom of the environment.

Wallace was famous on account of the phenomenal amount he wrote, including novels, short stories, plays and newspaper articles. Certainly this man who rose from nothing, who started his career as a journalist in the Boer War, was gifted with a richness of imagination, and sometimes with a jovial frankness of perception, which would put to shame many very learned writers. Wallace is very lacking in taste and artistic feeling, and there is hardly any trace in his work of a problem or an interior drama; but he so developed his sense of effect and dramatic opportunity, his talent for action and his flair for rapid, intense and compact events, that some of his scenes, both in his novels and in his plays, must be considered on their own ground as models and little masterpieces.

It is needless to add that Wallace was not the only English writer to have a success with this form of play. We may recall John Joy Bell's sensational one-act play *Thread o' Scarlet* (1923), worth noticing for its excellent construction; Bell is also the author of comedies on Scotch subjects. A writer in a more modern vein is Robin Millar, who in *Thunder in the Air* (1928) has fused the psychic drama with the thriller, appealing to the intellectuals yet at the same time obtaining a popular success. Eliot Crawshay Williams also attempted with success the comic and bizarre Grand Guignol. Emlyn Williams, a young Welshman, showed in *A Murder has been Arranged* (1930) that he possessed an imaginative and *creative* sense of the horrible, which induced one critic to compare him to Poe. The plot

develops round the figure of a man who is to inherit a fortune if he is alive at eleven P.M. on a fixed day; on that very evening he invites his friends to a party on the stage of a theatre; the curtain goes up some time before the guests arrive; but before eleven o'clock strikes, the heir has been murdered. The rest of the play is based on this event.

These plays are nothing, in fact, but contemporary versions of theatrical devices which have existed ever since the drama began; but what characterizes these latter years is their popularity; the fact that the people, though they have started going to Shakespeare more than they did fifteen years ago (and this is not altogether a good sign, because it means that contemporary drama does not satisfy all their spiritual needs), have no longer any real, widespread and widely felt problem which they expect their dramatists to treat. For this reason the dramatists, even if at heart they long for a drama with a more serious and universal content, are forced very often to comply with the needs of the times and insert a horrible or macabre element in a play which could otherwise be treated on quite different lines, or else simply devote their talent to constructing a good mystery play. Among the more recent examples of this is *The Anatomist* (1931) by James Bridie, in which figures and scenes of intellectual Edinburgh a hundred years ago are cleverly reconstructed; the central figure is a dreadful Dr. Knox, who, in order that he shall not lack material for dissecting, acquires corpses cheaply from assassins and grave robbers, and seeks consolation for his amorous disappointments in the tavern. The theme is taken from a true historical episode, and would have presented a thousand possibilities if the author had not

yielded to the temptation of exploiting all the most melodramatic and inartistic elements, showing us the scene of the drink-shop where a drunk young prostitute falls into the hands of the two roughs who are to sell her the next day as an anatomical specimen, and, in the following act, the arrival of the box with the specimen inside at Dr. Knox's dissecting room.

Let us examine another recent success, *Dangerous Corner* (1932) by J. B. Priestley. A family group consisting of three men and three women is assembled in a drawing-room; the whole action revolves round a character who is already dead. The brother of this dead man becomes suspicious on account of a few imprudent words exchanged between two of the women, and holds a desperate inquest for the whole three acts. He ends by discovering that not only his wife but also her brother (a hysterical young pervert) have been lovers of the dear deceased, besides other irregularities of the other characters. Disgusted at all this, the extemporary Sherlock Holmes finally kills himself; at this point, however, there is a black-out, and we return to the opening scene of the first act. At the critical moment the two characters who had spoken the imprudent sentences look up and scrutinize each other, but do not say anything. The others start dancing to the wireless; the dangerous corner has been turned without disaster.

What progress has been made since the age of Victorian prudery! But what is more interesting to note here is that Priestley, who is moreover a talented novelist of some originality, decided, or was forced, to make his début as a dramatist with this play which is, in so many respects, meretricious.

A last palpitation of pre-war dramatic realism has been felt in the past years, with the arrival of the fashion for "professional" drama. This sprang from the war drama, which, as has been seen, had already enjoyed popularity in America. Everyone remembers the type of disillusioned, crude war novel which flooded the bookshop windows of half the world between 1924 and 1930. They were mostly mediocre books, although they contained at least one very noble element—the endeavour to take away from the phenomenon of war every chance rhetorical aspect, and to look at it honestly in its human reality. Here also the English were later in the field, but their contributions were good. *Journey's End* was not performed till 1929, although it was written some years before. As a play it is full of faults, like nearly all noble and unusual works; but the marvel of *Journey's End* is precisely that it seems to spring from the events themselves, and that Sherriff is the instrument, not the creator, of these great truths which must be spoken. It does not deal with a logical truth, but with something greater, with an ancient, human truth which is expressed in some really immortal pages of Tolstoy—the fact that the fighter, the genuine heroic fighter, *is afraid*. Is not this really the true drama of military heroism? Is it not the true drama of any heroism? Further still, is it not drama *tout court*? If Medea's heart had not bled when she killed her sons, would this scene of great tragedy remain above the level of the commonest Grand Guignol?

I must ask the reader's forgiveness for all these rhetorical questions; they are in bad taste, to-day. The fact is that literature and drama, from Christianity onwards, have

tended to subjectivize what pagan inspiration objectivized, and the gods and fate of Greek drama have become in modern drama the discordant motives of the soul. To-day we think that the real cowards are those who are afraid of courage; the courageous, on the other hand, have the courage of their fear. In Sherriff's play there is a further element, not the best, which is the love of a *fiancée* at home who must never know that her hero continually resorts to whisky to brace up his nerves, which have gone to pieces after many months in the trenches, in order to be able to inspire the soldiers of his company, who admire and follow him with faith and courage. This *fiancée*, compared with the greatness of the human truth which the play presents, is a little stratagem which had a strong sentimental effect on the English public, especially on the women, but it is not strictly necessary. The human soul (or I should say rather the Christian soul), which knows no greater torment than internal conflict, is portrayed, in these few scenes, and especially in the second act, where the play reaches its crisis and could well end, in one of its saddest and most widely significant attitudes, torn between duty and instinct, between dignity and fear. Sherriff has been clever enough to let the war speak for itself; it is one of the very rare cases I know of in which art has been attained by photography, through a simple process of selection. The author's next play, *Badger's Green* (1931), dealing with lower middle-class provincial life, does not maintain the high level of the former work.

Stephen King-Hall, an ex-naval Commander, has tried, with a certain cleverness and success, to apply the same process to naval experiences. *Sailors' Knots* (1930) and

The Middle Watch, written in collaboration with Ian Hay, have at least the great merit of making us forget the sailors and officers of operetta and variety, and the old jokes about the senior service, still acceptable to the lower middle classes who frequent the theatre. Better still is *B. J. One* (1930), written by King-Hall alone, which deals with life on a warship, and in which a social and political element is inserted which is not wholly effective. The best point of this form of drama is that it puts us into direct contact with a professional experience which interests a large category of men, and makes us acquainted with the general outlook and daily experience of those in a certain vocation or profession. This "professional realism" has spread, and in recent years has produced some interesting works, such as *Nine till Six* (1930) by Aimée and Philip Stuart. In this comedy in three acts all the characters are feminine, and the daily life of a millinery and dressmaking shop is shown, with all its exasperating likes and dislikes, its intrigues, its tragedy and comedy. The same authors have attempted other variations on a similar theme, but with less success, in *Her Shop* (1930) and *Supply and Demand* (1931).

These are the last sparks of realism, which, having sprung from a lofty moral and social passion, lost, after the war, its real content and source of inspiration, both epical and ethical, and now feebly survives in the form of a curiosity, sometimes very banal, about all human things; it is the curiosity of wanting to peep into closed places, of wanting to penetrate into the habits and feelings of people with whom we have no intimate contact in ordinary life. We might call it *Ulyssism*, but with an element of petty gossip, and with a background of rather discouraged and

disillusioned bitterness. "Professional realism" makes an appeal to a superficial curiosity, and we find other similar works which are also based on episodes and not on some deeper reality, such as *The Matriarch* (1929) by Miss G. B. Stern, adapted from her novel *Tents of Israel*. The theme of this play, which is that of the family life of the Jews in the Western world, gives it a great deal of power; but much more typically *episodical* (and in fact it had a much greater success) is *Autumn Crocus* by C. L. Anthony. This is the story of a late and melancholy little love affair during a holiday in Austria, and is a work of small depth, although it strikes a little chord of emotion, and has aroused the enthusiasm of thousands of melancholy Anglo-Saxon spinsters. The comical anecdote, on the other hand, has recently obtained success for J. Bernard Fagan with *Mr. Faint-Heart*; but Fagan is an old hand, and had already won public approval with an adaptation for the stage, among other things, of some of the episodes from Pepys' *Diary*. I must also mention *Musical Chairs* (1932), by the late Ronald Mackenzie, produced by Komisarjevsky, which was declared by some London critics to be an exceptional play.

John Van Druten, of Dutch descent, and still comparatively young, deserves more attention. His first, and up till now his greatest, success was *Young Woodley* (1928). There followed *Diversion* (1929), *London Wall* (1931) and others. *London Wall* belongs to the category of "professional drama", and deals with the lives of the secretaries and typists in a large office in the City. *Young Woodley* is the subtle, slightly psycho-analytical drama of the love of a public school boy for the wife of his housemaster. In

After All there is a hint of a theme; after all, the old generation, with their old-fashioned ideas, are sometimes right, and this is the conclusion which the young son and daughter reach after having experimented with certain modern ways of living very dear to some of the younger generation. If, however, this is to be classified as a "problem play", it means that we have returned, having lost a good deal, to Pinero, for there is wanting that background of ethical and epical enthusiasm which impelled the Ibsenians and realists, of whom so much has been written in these pages, towards the drama. Indeed one might say that Van Druten has no remarkable qualities except the rather decadent and sickly sensitiveness of post-war adolescence, like that of young Woodley himself. His drama is never a conflict, but always a downfall; his principal characters, those with most artistic meaning, can all be boiled down to young Woodley, and there is a very obvious, essentially erotic, neurosis in them. When art presents us with a "human case" which reminds us too easily of a "medical case", there arises the just suspicion that our interest has simply been aroused by the abnormality. Art moves in the sphere of the normal; everything which it touches on should be a part of our ordinary spiritual existence. Thus it occurs that certain forms of modern psycho-analytical realism, as far as art is concerned, obtain no better results than the coarse "medical" realism which was fashionable thirty or forty years ago. As soon as we suspect that the *case* has been analysed by the author before being grasped by intuition, we feel we are no longer in the theatre, but in a clinic. Not that these remarks apply exactly to Van Druten, even if he seems to

have collected, as a dramatist, nearly all the faults and weaknesses of his generation. He has also its good qualities, those of frank adherence to reality, and acceptance of reality without reserve, without illusions, but also without noble, or futile, rebellion; and this contemplation of the real, though retaining certain artistic effects which really belong to the drama, is in its essence lyrical.

As Van Druten is always extremely theatrical, he possesses the instincts and technique of his trade to a surprising extent, and this prevents him from falling into those mannerisms which many better dramatists than he indulge in. Although he is very modern in his tastes and instincts, he cannot be classified according to any modern school; he cannot be classed among the intimists, for example, to whom Milne would seem rather to belong, nor among the expressionists. But it must be added that in general English drama does not recognize these *schools*, which have sprung from the intellectual needs and polemical contingencies of other races and countries. In this sense America, as has been seen, is much more *continental* and *European* than old England. Not even an intellectual such as Aldous Huxley, so knowing, discursive and up to date about all intellectual movements on the Continent, can be classed in any of the continental categories. His dramatic work, up to the present, has not contributed very much to his fame. We may mention *The Discovery*, *This Way to Paradise* (which is an adaptation by Charles Dixon of the novel *Point Counter Point*) and *The World of Light* (1931), which is partly a satire on spiritualism as a religion, but is also a justification of it, if and so far as it represents, for certain souls, the unique means of communicating with

other souls, of penetrating them, and of establishing bonds of sympathy. It is an intense, very subtle play, rich in ideas, but of an intensity and richness which have a contemplative rather than a dramatic value. But as I refuse to deny that contemplation has also an artistic value, I suggest that Huxley's ultimate artistic value, in the drama as in the novel, is purely lyrical.

The drama as a pastime is surely a legitimate pastime, although there is always someone ready to raise the question of morals, which is apt to cloud the issue, all the more so as it is so difficult to draw a strict line between the pure and simple pastime and Art. Half the theatres in London are permanently given over to musical comedy, variety and revue, in fact, to spectacles which have nothing to do with Art with a capital A. Nevertheless many artists are to-day drawing nearer to this form of spectacle, and are devoting their talents to it. It is the old story of mimes and pantomimes supplanting pure comedy and austere, developed tragedy. Is the difference only one of technique, pure and simple? May there not be an equal substratum of art, or at least an equal artistic value, in these different productions, which are more popular and give more easy amusement?

The popular, humorous or suggestive and erotic spectacle, with dancing, music and other frivolous accompaniments, has always gone on boldly existing while serious people went to see the dramas spoken of in this book. But the present day is characterized by the fact that even the best geniuses of the theatre dedicate themselves to this form of production, or to constructing a type of spectacle which has a fundamental lack of *seriousness*. By this

menacing word I mean devotion to their job, the profound adherence of the writer's soul to what is expressed. These writers, too, have got problems in their minds, but they end by yawning over them: they feel themselves detached from the public, whom they now consider as a species of raw material, of which it is necessary to know all the exploitable qualities before the goal of success can be reached—not only, and not necessarily, financial success, but the immediate, pleasing, light-hearted liking of the masses in the theatre for the work which is being performed. Like old aristocrats who have lost their historical function, and who are content to play the nobleman before the admiring snobbery of the lower classes, the members of this "ruling intellectual class", who have lost the moral fervour of those who rule, amidst a people who are content to live according to old customs and really ask nothing better than to be ruled, do nothing but act and exploit their role of intellectuals. They work with thought and intelligence, but not with the soul; they have talent, taste and imagination, but no inspiration, in fact one would say that they took care not to have any. They meditate on the taste and feelings of the public and study the means of satisfying them. Finally, even *they* express something, that is, the soul of a period and a social environment not rich in passion and will.

I have written these observations thinking principally of Noel Coward, but before coming to him, let us see what the other providers of light public amusement have to say, the inveterate professional farce writers. Ben Travers is a good example, and a complete list of his works would be very long indeed; *Rookery Nook* is perhaps the most

successful, also as a film, but *Thark*, *Plunder* and *A Night like this* (1930) must also be mentioned. The farcical effect here lies entirely in the action of the plot, and in the situations, and relies chiefly on the popularity of certain special actors, whom Travers has in mind when he writes. This clearly approaches the masquerade, with the difference that the mask, as a type, *exists*, while the heroes of these farces are more typical in their action than in their character. Being undifferentiated characters from the middle classes, they can, for the most part, represent Tom, Dick and Harry; anyone in the audience can imagine himself in the situations in which they find themselves; the comic-dramatic stimulus springs from this generic similarity, from this possible confusion between the spectator and the character. Also the language used, taken from ordinary current slang, makes easier this cordial, humorous collaboration between the actors and the pit. We are in the atmosphere, *mutatis mutandis*, of the old Latin farces and the interludes of the medieval miracle plays; but the characters, although conventional, are not drawn from the people, as is usually the case in this sort of entertainment, and the farce is not principally intended for a popular public. Types from the people often figure in these plays, following very old models; but the interesting novelty is in the prevalence of *middle-class* types which have become *masks*. And as the middle classes in general, and especially those of modern industrial civilization, as has been said before, are extremely *conformist*, and only show their individualistic spirit by a voluntary levelling of everyone to one common type of mentality, behaviour and even physical appearance, it follows that the new *middle-class*

mask is much less distinctive, typical and individuated than the old popular mask. For when the Italians made a middle-class type into a mask (such as Pantaloon), they endowed it with their imagination, and simplified but broadened its lines; they cast it in a definite mould, but in a form which was something between the grotesque and the heroic, very distinctive, pompous and significant, in fact artistic. The actors who played these parts were mostly from the people themselves, and in any case expressed the feelings, instincts and reactions of their audience. With these modern actors one knows at once how they will develop the action, once the situation has been sketched out; the words of the script matter very little; George Robey, or Tom Walls, once they are set going, have got their recognized system of *subjects* and developments: the old comedy of improvisation is not far off.

One would say that these middle classes, who furnish the generic types for the new popular middle-class drama, who go and applaud it, who are increasing in numbers, standardizing their manners, and losing the passions, the historical, religious, moral and even economic impulses by means of which they formed and asserted themselves, were becoming, without losing their own characteristics, a new *people*, a firm, passive substratum of society, who for that reason can easily be represented in a conventional, farcical way. . . . But this sounds like too weighty and serious a speech to make about the agreeable Ben Travers, who, after all, does nothing but continue and develop old tricks of the theatre which have never ceased to exist, adapting them to new needs. The sensational or satirical comedies of Frederick Lonsdale, which are undoubtedly

more subtly and thoughtfully written, might also be mentioned. From there it is a relatively short step to variety, vaudeville and revue. The authors of the revue sketches are sometimes men of unusual literary and dramatic talent, such as J. H. Turner, a fine writer, who in 1932 produced a successful *Punchinello*, the very popular Dion Titheradge, Ronald Jeans and finally Harold Simpson and L. du Garde Peach, who besides revue sketches have also written little scenes and plays for broadcasting.

But we have still to speak of the much more characteristic and modern phenomenon of literary and dramatic sophistication, as shown by Noel Coward and his followers. On leaving the university, Noel Coward found he possessed genius, talent and ideas, if not exactly ideals. He moved in theatrical circles, without differing very much from other young men of his type. Like other young men he was seized first of all with moralistic cynicism—"What are the morals of our time? Are there any?" He did not find any; because morals, like religion, are not to be found—one has them already; those who look for God have already found him, but those who look for the first rules of their own conduct will never find them. Religion is a cause, but morals are a result. Thus it occurs that epochs of great religious passion and research are epochs of formation and growth; the epochs in which morals are widely discussed are precisely those which have seen the breaking-up of old-fashioned morals, without any new ones being formed. The *pure* moralists are people who busy themselves in repairing the roof of a house whose foundations are crumbling away. It is a moralism which in its groping ends by turning on itself, desperate and despairing. Such is

the moralism of Noel Coward in his few serious plays: *Easy Virtue*, *The Rat Trap* and *The Vortex*. The last is perhaps the most worth noticing, because in the technique, which recalls the work of the intimists and expressionists, one already sees the Coward who was to reveal himself soon afterwards, extremely clever at stage effects, but very indifferent to the intellectual content of his work. Among the comedies by this rapid and very productive writer, *The Young Idea* had a certain success; it shows how a modern son and a daughter, unprejudiced in the modern manner, re-establish mutual affection between their parents, who are divided by those prejudices and hypocrisies which all young generations attribute to the generation before. It is a very effective but ingenuous comedy, written by a young man who still cherished illusions about his contemporaries, and had not found himself face to face with the *constants* of human reality. But Coward is not one of those men who linger by the way, and pause to consider every interior problem. Soon afterwards he brought out another comedy, *Private Lives*, which had a great success. Here we are in the most fashionable *milieu* of the new generation: a husband and wife, still young, have had a divorce and have each married again; but chance brings them together after a short time, the old flame is revived, and they escape from their respective second partners and live together, each committing adultery with their former legitimate half. The dialogue is a masterpiece of subtlety, humour and moral laxity. If one felt that the mind of the author was anchored to a firm principle, to a fixed moral standard, it would be a ferocious satire. But this is really irony which is ironical at its own expense,

and hides its bitterness under a smile which sees no future; Wilde and the "Naughty 'Nineties" did not produce anything so desperate, so fluently amusing and so inwardly empty as this.

It is a sign of the times that Coward seems to have found in his own talent and in his own success a reason for continuing to live and work. He has written operettas such as *Bitter Sweet* (1929), and spectacles such as *Cavalcade* (1931). *Bitter Sweet* is the story of an aristocratic young English girl of about fifty years ago who elopes with her Zigeuner music master; when the latter is killed in a duel in Vienna she returns to take her place again in London society, but in her heart remains faithful to the end to the great passionate romance of her youth. Among the youth of to-day, fatuous, sceptical, Americanized, inconsistent and as incapable of virtue as of passion, she is able to repeat with pride the musical and sentimental theme of her early love. The enormous success which *Bitter Sweet* enjoyed was characteristic of modern times. In *Cavalcade* there are no less than twenty-two scenes, all of which have some historical interest or significance, even where it is indirect. In the first scene a young married couple are celebrating the birth of this century; in another we see Kensington Gardens on the morning of Queen Victoria's death, with people dressed in black walking silently and funereally up and down. Other scenes refer to the Boer War, the loss of the *Titanic*, the outbreak of the Great War, the night of the Armistice and the post-war period with its feverishness and disillusions. The production was characterized by a huge variety of new and clever devices; there was a positive orgy of scenery, making one

think of a spectacle in the time of the late Roman Empire helped out by modern technical methods. The moral of this lavish spectacle is meant to be, and to some extent is, an exaltation of the solidity and continuity of the British race through all the fortunes, crises and troubles of the last thirty years. Coward has succeeded in fact, with novelty, shrewdness, and an immense mastery of technique, in touching the ever-popular chord of patriotism. In *Bitter Sweet* he utilized erotic-romantic sentimentalism; in *Private Lives* (1930), as elsewhere, he exploited the snobbery of the middle classes, who were curious to see what went on in more fashionable and exclusive circles. He will certainly find other themes which he will treat cleverly and successfully. I have paused longer here over Coward's work than its artistic value merits, because I see in him the most typical English stage writer of the present day.

There are other young men who may be compared to Coward, such as Ivor Novello, who is also a man of many talents, an actor, producer, dramatist and composer. A very characteristic comedy of his is *Symphony in Two Flats* (1929), which presents the somewhat unusual inhabitants of two separate modern apartments in a block of studio flats; *I Lived With You* (1932) is more serious, and written with more human understanding. Roland Pertwee, who has attempted other forms of writing besides drama, may be mentioned; also Frank Vosper, who in *Lucky Dip* (1930) produced an example of the cocktail-party comedy: here we see idle, gilded and not very virtuous youth of all sexes (for in certain mixed modern society there seem to be more than two) which seems to find an almost symbolical

expression of what is left of its humanity in the artificiality of cocktails. But it must not be deduced from this that Vosper, or others of the same group, have a deep satirical intention; they have only the talent of humorously reproducing realities.

The elegance, finish and polished simplicity with which modern English comedies are staged to-day is largely due to the producers, of whom I should have liked to have spoken if there had been space. Much progress has been made since that kind of theatrical life which was satirized in Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells*; almost every trace of bohemianism has disappeared. But this is certainly also due to the influence of social environment and the tastes and mentality of the public, especially in London, and to the obliteration of all very marked differences between the habits and mentality of actors and actresses and those of so many of the upper, middle and lower-middle classes who live completely out of touch with the theatre. It sometimes occurs that a company formed to act a successful comedy in London then goes on tour in the provinces, but generally for each particular production a company is formed with fresh actors; and the actor lives like a professional man on his own, aiming solely at procuring good parts in plays which are likely to run the longest. This system has its advantages and disadvantages, but it certainly spares the actor a wandering life, and enables him to have ordinary social interests, in fact to be more like other men. Only in the so-called non-legitimate drama, such as musical comedy, vaudeville, revue, and so on, is there still to be found a somewhat hybrid, characteristic back-stage atmosphere to tally with that of former days; for here certain

general conditions have never changed, and perhaps never will.

Here my story of modern English drama ends. Like all true stories, it is much more interesting in reality than when it is related. But I have tried to keep as strictly as possible to reality, and not to indulge in unjust omissions or arbitrary summaries and short-cuts, however pleasing they might seem; although this scrupulous method has sometimes entailed boring repetitions and monotonous lists of names. But it is always so easy, in these cases, to write a *good* book full of mistakes! I have conscientiously tried to write a *true* book rather than a *good* one. It is really a novel in which the central character, so to speak, is the English soul. As this soul was born a long time before my story began, I tried, perhaps not very successfully, to give a brief summary of some of its former characteristics, and to define its constant interior duality of motives, divisible into so many antinomies, such as classicism and romanticism, Latinity and Germanism, Catholicism and Protestantism, practicalness and sentimentalism, empiric rationalism and imaginative seeking after possible alternatives. This interior conflict constitutes a dramatic element; and I have insisted on the fact that this drama inherent in the English soul does not find an outlet or a solution in contemplative rationalism; it never reaches a metaphysic of its own. If it did, the drama would be played out, and the character of the nation would begin to change. It is a drama which, in its mature phases, resolves itself into a lyrical fantasy, and in this fantasy simply finds the childish and virginal motives of the *epos*: as for the so-called great English *lyric*,

if the use of the terms were adopted which I propose, and which seems to me more correct and less ambiguous than the current usage, it should really be called *epic*.

In conclusion the English spirit, when, and in so far as, it overcomes its own inward drama, finds itself a child again, not a philosopher. And this child will evolve, in new forms, the old process of former cycles; it will push onward towards new ideals, inspired by a new formula of faith, or will (the two things are really the same), and will find itself again in self-conflict, and will develop a new form of drama; emerging from drama through the usual loophole of imagination, it will become decadent for a number of years. The decadent, like the great, periods of the British are short and of frequent repetition. The British are a people who arrive easily and quickly at extremes of civilization, or of decadence; but they cannot stay for long at one or the other extreme. Also, I should say, they do not *want* to stay in any one state for long: perhaps their best and most constant virtue is that of knowing how to be displeased with themselves; but their innate, and apparently incurable childishness, and their power of fantasy, prevent them from being despondent even when they are most displeased.

The dramatic-historical cycle which I have treated recalls another very striking period in English history, that which stretches from Henry VIII, through the reigns of Elizabeth and Cromwell, to the Restoration. The modern cycle also has at its centre the figure of a great Queen; it has had its great military feats and its great civil disturbances; both periods have produced a great drama. Now, in so many respects, we are again in the atmosphere of the Restoration. It is easy to foresee, to the confusion of

defeatists, within and without, that England will not remain for long in this phase; although it is not possible to guess to-day how she will emerge from it.

England emerged from the collapse which followed the close of the preceding cycle with a whole new system of compromises regarding the monarchy, the constitution, social order and religion. The Puritan, mercantile middle classes were for a time discomfited, at least officially; but the ruling classes, the nobles, courtiers and landowners, were still forced to reckon with them. In the nineteenth century these middle classes, with a more or less unchanged social and religious mentality, won on all points; they even made use of what was still valid in the old principles (the monarchy, the nobility and the landed proprietors, and the High Church) to further their own victorious ends. Perhaps history has never seen a more complete social transformation; and what is particularly striking in the present state of affairs is precisely the completeness of that victory in all fields; it is the fact that the *whole* daily life of the country was shaped by the development of a single nucleus of ideas, principles, habits and instincts. The very economic and political greatness of the Victorian and Edwardian periods is frightening to-day, because never had England, or perhaps any great country, gone through such a long and great period of fortune and prosperity.

Too often in history the middle classes, after their complete triumphs, leave dust and ashes behind them; and looking at the question from this point of view, it may seem that the pessimists are right. But I have observed that in England these middle classes, earlier and to a greater extent than in other countries, have already started to

become the people, or, to be perhaps more exact, a new populace. Their *conformism*, a little childish, thrusts them in this direction; and as long as there is a people with well-defined and strong characteristics, there is hope; I mean that the foundations are not lacking on which a great and living social structure will be able to rise up anew.

From the time of the aristo-oligarchic condition of English society in the eighteenth century to the rather weak democracy of the present day, which needs and yet fears dictatorship, the soul of this people, especially of the middle classes, has lived a great drama, or rather a very striking and acute phase of the typical drama, whose roots are always in its nature; and, what concerns us more directly, has expressed it in those ways, among others, which form the object and material of the present work. Thus we have seen how the new middle classes, after the hour of their victory, began to feel the need of seeing themselves as they were, in order to judge themselves; we have seen how this judgement was in many ways negative, and how from this many moral and social improvements originated, as well as many artistic manifestations of high dramatic value; we have seen how these middle classes, following the law innate in their historical nature without meeting with any more obstacles or exterior checks, gave their tone to the whole of life, and then went out to break themselves in that immense clash of all individualisms (moral, economical and political) which was the Great War; and finally how the war was the great crisis of this middle-class world, because it revealed and, to a great extent, smashed its absurdities, while deflecting its good forces into different paths, compelling them to start, or insert themselves into,

new historical processes. The English middle classes were too great in their period of success not to compel the country now, at the time of reckoning, to go through a period of disorientation and discouragement and, in art, of melancholy and indolence. English present-day drama is a proof of this.

It will be asked if it is lawful to place such importance on the historical significance of drama and the theatre, and, on the other hand, to give such importance to history for the understanding and valuation of the drama. On this point I must leave myself entirely to the judgement of my critics; if this book has, even to the slightest extent, succeeded, this in itself should be a proof that its method is good. I persist in affirming that drama is, so to speak, the *father* of literature, in the same sense in which it has been said that architecture is the mother of the figurative arts. Utility, social need, the transcendency of the end over the individual, and the ethical intention are the fundamental secrets of architecture as of drama, and so of all arts and all literature, in proportion to their inward dependence on the architectonic and dramatic. Speaking in particular of literature, the equation "art-language" no longer needs to be demonstrated here; but it is useful to recall that language implies society, and society, a plurality of human subjects, which in its turn implies drama: it being clearly understood that this plurality of human subjects lives, as such, in man, and is felt, as such, by man. It is not therefore surprising that when it is clearly and consciously expressed, as occurs in the drama, the result is a work of art which is most directly derived from, and bears the most significant witness to, the history lived by man.

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